FROM THE BRINK... TO THE BRINK. KENTUCKY CLOSES IN ON 40–0

Sports Illustrated

+

APRIL 6, 2015

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EXCLUSIVE

THE ATHLETICISM OF LEBRON
+
THE DRIVE OF KOBE

RUSSELL WESTBROOK

BY LEE JENKINS P. 38



LAST YEAR, YOU COULD DRAG RACE DRAG QUEENS AND KARAOKE WITH HIP-HOP LEGENDS. THIS YEAR, WHO KNOWS WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

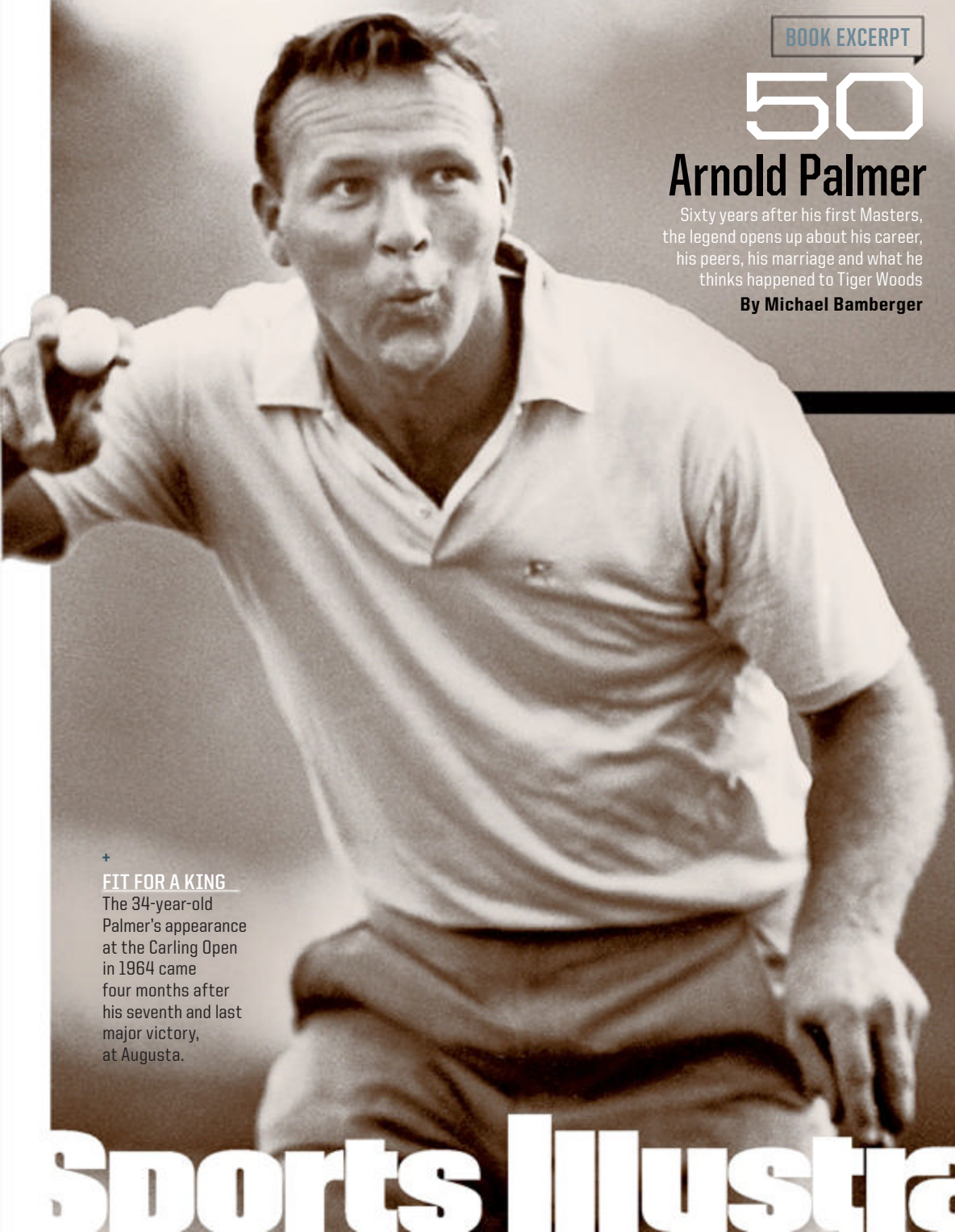
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BOOK EXCERPT

50 Arnold Palmer

Sixty years after his first Masters, the legend opens up about his career, his peers, his marriage and what he thinks happened to Tiger Woods

By Michael Bamberger

+

FIT FOR A KING

The 34-year-old Palmer's appearance at the Carling Open in 1964 came four months after his seventh and last major victory, at Augusta.

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Sam Dekker shot Wisconsin to Indy and a showdown with powerhouse Kentucky

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No one plays harder, but there's a method to his madness
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SI HAS REGIONAL COVERS THIS WEEK: GREG NELSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (WESTBROOK); DAVID RICHARD/AP (KARL-ANTHONY TOWNS)

THIS PAGE: WALTER IOOSS JR. FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Sports Illustrated


FLORIDA
23
STATE



1 of 3

Leading Off

Arms of Coates

Florida State guard Emiah Bingley may have regretted venturing into the paint against South Carolina on Sunday: When she got there she was greeted by a crowd led by 6' 4" Gamecocks center Alaina Coates (green sneakers), who had nine inches on Bingley *before* leaving the ground. Behind 14 points from Coates and a game-high 21 from guard Tiffany Mitchell (25), South Carolina beat the Seminoles 80–74 to lock down the first women's Final Four appearance in school history.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
CHRIS KEANE
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED


NCAA
SPARTANS
45
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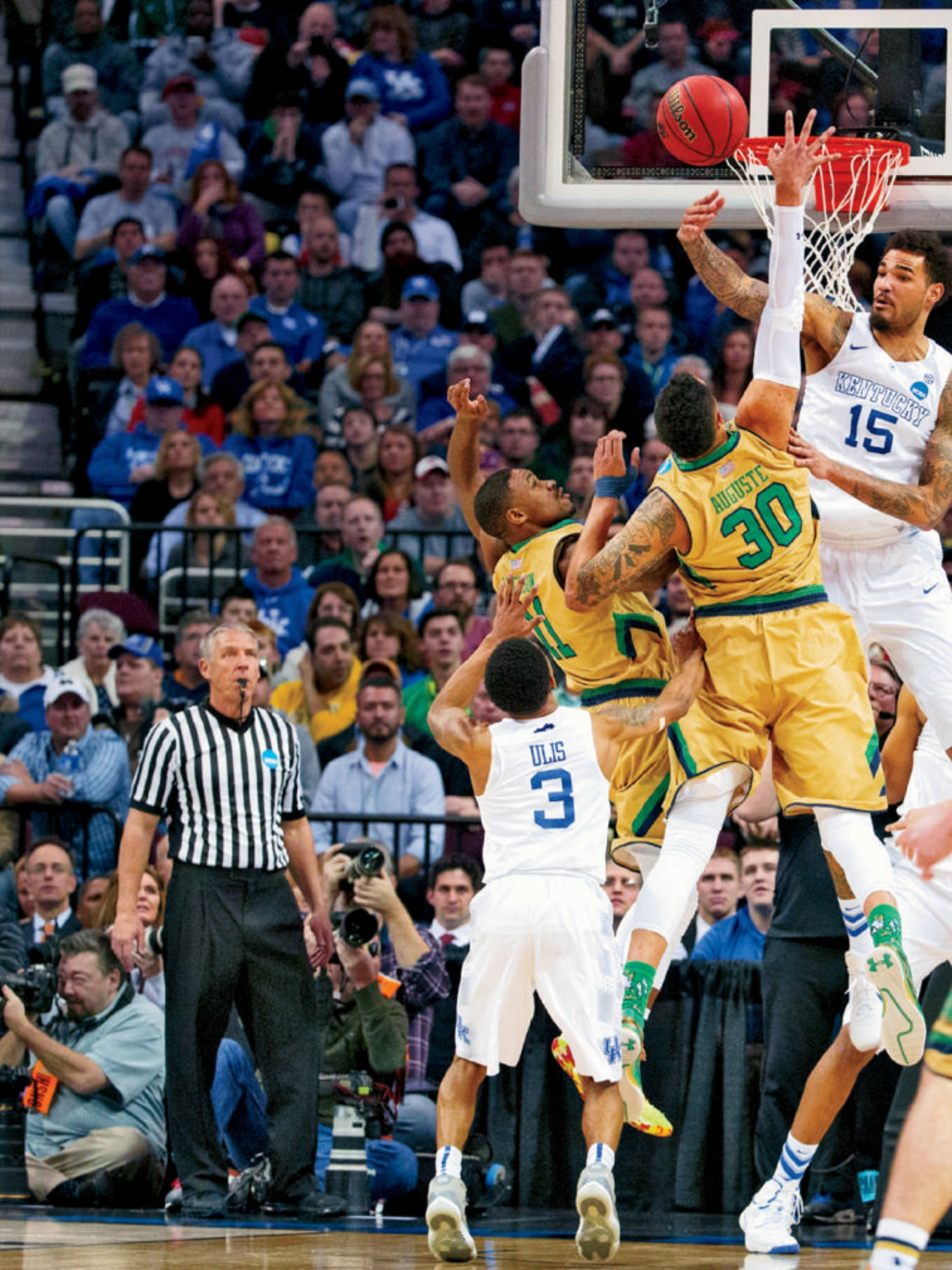
2 of 3

Leading Off

Arch Madness

There is only one non–No. 1 seed in the Final Four, but regardless of where Michigan State begins the month, it's no upset when a Tom Izzo–coached team is part of the final quartet. On Sunday the seventh-seeded Spartans—with the help of 15 points from junior guard Denzel Valentine (45)—beat No. 4 Louisville in overtime to win the East Regional and send Izzo to the Final Four for the seventh time in his 20 years at Michigan State. Izzo is the only coach to reach three Final Fours with teams seeded No. 5 or lower.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
AL TIELEMANS
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED


KENTUCKY
15
AUGUSTE
30
ULIS
3



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Leading Off

Auguste Decree

Kentucky heads into the Final Four with 38 wins, and none have been harder-earned than the Wildcats' 68–66 victory over Notre Dame in the Midwest Regional final last Saturday *(page 28)*. The Irish, who got 20 points from power forward Zach Auguste (30), led the Cats for most of the second half, but Kentucky proved too strong inside in the final minutes—something Auguste discovered when he tried to take it to the rim against 7-foot Willie Cauley-Stein (15). Kentucky's next step on the road to 40–0: the national semifinal against Wisconsin on Saturday in Indianapolis.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAVID E. KLUTHO
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

SI NOW WITH HOST MAGGIE GRAY



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ALONZO MOURNING

The Hall of Fame center and seven-time NBA All-Star discusses the advice he gave his son Trey, a 6' 9" freshman forward at Georgetown, and LeBron James's departure from the Heat.

MAGGIE GRAY: *What was the day like when LeBron decided to go back to Cleveland?*

ALONZO MOURNING: Deflating. Deflating because nobody expected it. It's unfortunate, but that's the business of basketball.

MG: *Where is LeBron's place in Heat history?*

AM: He's going to go down as one of the greatest players in the history of our organization [Mourning played almost 10 seasons for the Heat and is now a team exec]. By far. I'm very thankful for the four years that he gave us. If you could ask any player to come and do what he did for the organization and for the city of Miami, you would take him and be thankful for it. You wouldn't expect him to leave, but you would be thankful.

MG: *Your son Trey is a freshman at your alma mater, Georgetown. Is his relationship with coach John Thompson III similar to the one you had with your coach, his father, John Thompson?*

AM: I think it's a lot different. That was a point in my life when I really needed that strong father figure. Back then that is truly what Big John was. He treated each and every one of us like we were his sons.

MG: *What do you tell your son about the idea of [leaving school early] and turning pro?*

AM: Well, he doesn't have to turn pro to take care of his parents. The one thing I did tell him is that his education comes first. I don't care how good you [can] become. Your education is the No. 1 priority right now. He realizes that. And he's a great student.

For more of Mourning's interview, plus the SI Now archive, go to ***SI.com/sinow***

> *"I'm very thankful for the four years that he gave us."*
> ***–Alonzo Mourning***

TUNE IN



EPISODE: MARCH 23
Is Georgia State junior guard **R.J. Hunter** good enough to play in the NBA?



EPISODE: MARCH 24
Mo'ne Davis explains why she forgave Bloomsburg University pitcher Joey Casselberry.



EPISODE: MARCH 25
Three-time Naismith award winner **Ralph Sampson** says college players should be paid.



EPISODE: MARCH 26
Why **John Calipari** should leave to coach in the NBA if Kentucky finishes undefeated.

BOB ROSATO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (MOURNING); KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES (HUNTER); AL TIELEMANS FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (DAVIS); ANDY HAYT FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (SAMPSON); DAVID E. KLUTHO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (CALIPARI)



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INBOX

FOR MARCH 23, 2015

Thank you for the gallery of Rich Clarkson photos (LEADING OFF). The shot of **Patrick Ewing** soaring over Kentucky guard Jim Master in the 1984 Final Four has always been my favorite. It should be noted, however, that Ewing was called for traveling, so the dunk was waved off.

Stephen Hashioka, Chicago



RICH CLARKSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (EWING); TODD ROSENBERG FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (COVER); CARLOS M. SAAVEDRA FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ROSENBERG); GREG NELSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (MILLS); DENNIS BAKER (COATES AND RAY)



Sammie Coates's friendship with **Kenzie Ray** is inspiring. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all paid more attention to and celebrated the good that can come out of relationships like these?

Robert Culbertson, Centennial, Colo.

I don't know how well Coates will do in the NFL, but I have a feeling he will do well in life. This Giants fan will root for him no matter which team he is on, and he'll be the No. 1 pick on my Good Guy fantasy team.

Len Farrell, Longs, S.C.

Your story on **Patty Mills** stirred up a variety of emotions: pride for Mills's rise to NBA champion but shame over certain aspects of my country's history regarding its indigenous people. Still, I was happy to see that you shared the story of Eddie Mabo's struggle with the Australian government and the positive impact it has had on Mills.

Joseph Sapienza
Perth, Australia



COVER



On Feb. 24, Maryland beat **Frank the Tank** and Wisconsin 59–53 because of the ballhandling skills of arguably the best guard duo in the country, freshman Melo Trimble and senior Dez Wells. I was disappointed to see that neither was mentioned in Phil Taylor's article on the country's best guards.

Eddie DuPriest
Smyrna, Ga.

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POINT AFTER

I thought **Michael Rosenberg**'s essay on college basketball's unbeatens should have at least mentioned UCLA. The Bruins had a record 88-game winning streak from 1971 to '74, including three NCAA championships.

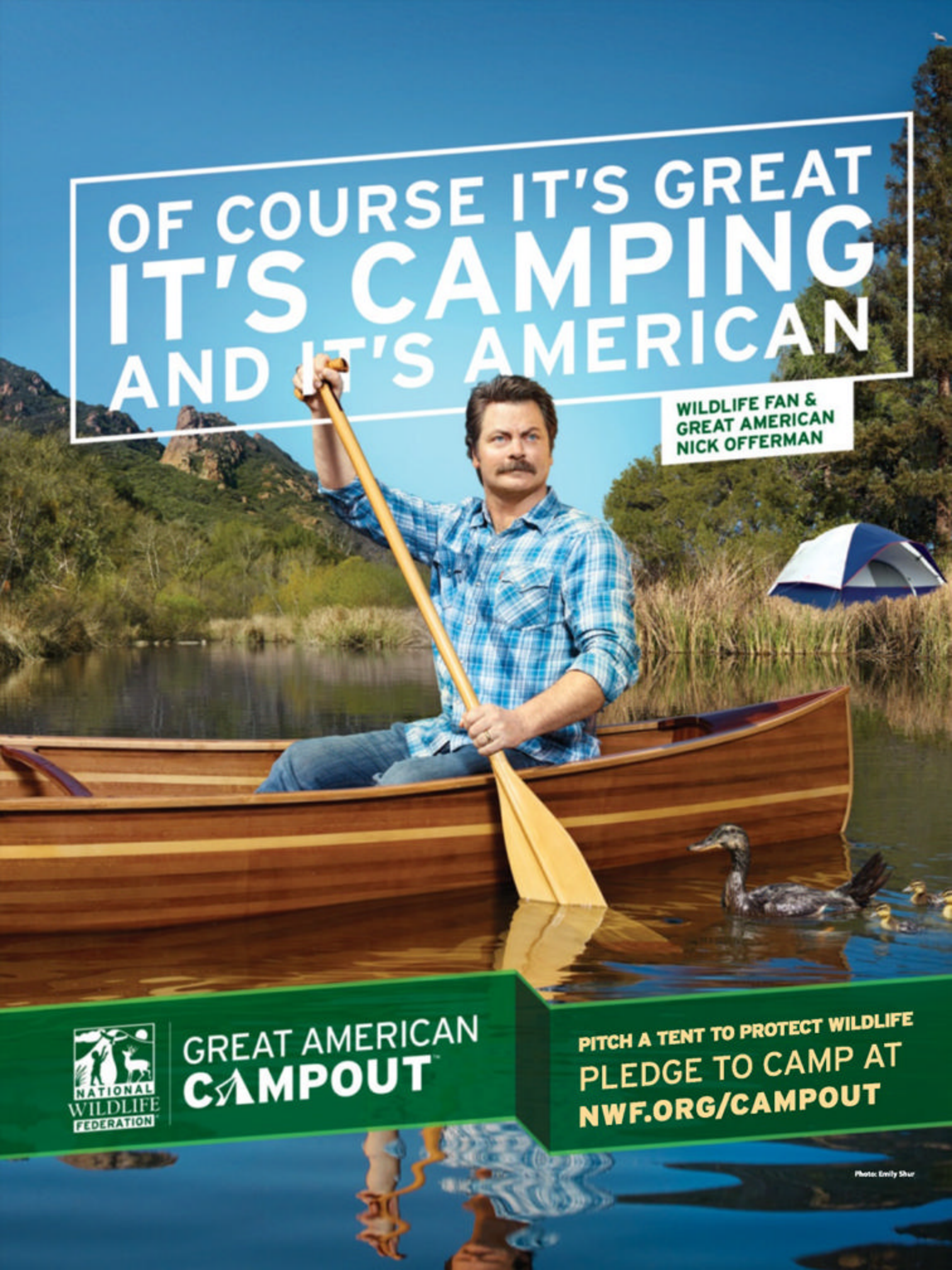
James M Baker
Rocklin, Calif.

As die-hard Indiana fans, my household has been on Kentucky Watch all season. Thank you for putting into words what fans of the '76 Hoosiers already know: Although their record will eventually be broken, they will always be tops in our hearts.

Scott Hannon
Bloomington, Ind.

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Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH

SCORECARD

Outpatient Rehab

A trip to the oncologist with Lance Armstrong reveals the ex-champion in exile—restless, feisty and . . . underappreciated?

BY ASHER PRICE

RECENTLY the oncologist Larry Einhorn sent a letter to each of the hundreds of patients who had once been in his care: As "a personal favor," he asked, would we be willing to return to Indianapolis for a follow-up exam? In an act that nicely capped his life's work, he wanted to collect information about the long-term consequences of a brutal but effective chemotherapy regimen he had long ago devised. If you received one of these letters, you had likely once been a young man struck by testicular cancer.

I was one of those patients. Lance Armstrong was another.

Einhorn, 72, had turned the tables on testicular cancer, making an insidious disease one of the most curable; a personal favor was the least he could ask. In late February, Armstrong and I flew together from Austin to Indianapolis, participants Nos. 198 and 199 in the Platinum Study, named for the key element in the compound Einhorn had seized upon to stymie our cancers.

It had not been a good month for Armstrong: An arbitration panel ruled that he owed $10 million to SCA Promotions—a company that he had sued in 2004 after it had declined to pay him bonuses for winning the Tour de France because of doping suspicions. And he had been forced to cop a guilty plea to plowing into a couple of parked cars in his SUV after his girlfriend initially told police she did it, a reminder, some commentators said, of his manipulative nature.

Those troubles faded in the waiting room at the Indiana University cancer pavilion, where there remains framed Lance Armstrong paraphernalia on the walls: covers from this magazine celebrating his Tour triumphs and a signed jersey. This oncology unit, where Armstrong had once been near death, is one of the last places on earth where the cloud that follows him has failed to cast its shadow.

"How'd you do on the pulse rate?" Armstrong asked as he slid into the chair next to me after the testing had begun.

"Forty-nine." I was pleased—less than 60 is really good. "How'd you do?"

He flashed a grin: "Forty-one."



BEFORE THE flight to Indy I had never met Armstrong in person, but he had helped me in my most desperate moment. Days after I was diagnosed back in January 2006, told at the age of 26 by an emergency room doctor in Austin that the small, hard protrusion

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW DEGRAFF



"THIS ONCOLOGY UNIT, WHERE ARMSTRONG HAD ONCE BEEN NEAR DEATH, IS ONE OF THE LAST PLACES WHERE THE CLOUD THAT FOLLOWS HIM HAS FAILED TO CAST ITS SHADOW."

in my left testicle was a tumor—"Exactly what Lance Armstrong had, so, you know, some people get this and live"—I unexpectedly got an email from the man himself. He was still very much a hero then, still seeing Sheryl Crow and still the official winner of seven Tours de France. Alerted to my diagnosis by a mutual friend, he sent me a quick pep talk from Johannesburg: "Of course I'm well familiar with what you're going through and am hoping for the best. I'm confident you'll be fine!" He encouraged me to "hang tough and keep livin' strong!" It felt like a Ruthian moment—Ballplayer Visits Sick Kid. Even more critically, he wrote Einhorn's clinic and asked them to squeeze me in.

By means of his chemotherapy regimen, Einhorn had extended our potential, replotting our trajectories from a rapid downward spiral to one where we could imagine a future. On the Tour, Lance, like other riders, had doctored his massive talent, too, extending his natural limits to maintain a competitive edge.

Those victories in France, however they were come by, helped enable the very real victories in cancer wards. There were the hundreds of millions of dollars raised through the Livestrong Foundation, the $3 billion Texas cancer-research referendum he successfully campaigned for, the private emails to lend hope to people like me. And so the rage, the moralizing that followed his confession to Oprah in 2013—FROM HERO TO ZERO crowed one headline—had always mystified me.

"Those of us in the cancer community remember the good he has done," said Einhorn, who is the Lance Armstrong Professor of Medicine at IU. Besides, he seemed to suggest, given the pervasiveness of doping in the sport, the means justified the ends. "You don't do all this good finishing 26th or 27th," Einhorn said.

The way Lance's lie had overshadowed his cancer work irked him. On the flight to Indianapolis, he noted that the media now called him "disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong." He observed that a recent story about how Roger

Clemens was tutoring his college-aged son in pitching failed to describe him as a disgraced baseball player. "And he gave how much back?" Lance asked. And then mouthed the word: Zero. (According to a 2010 *New York Times* article the Roger Clemens Foundation has raised more than $1 million to aid children's educational and athletic organizations.)

More than anything, Armstrong struck me as both a little restless and a little aimless. He has been deemed radioactive by most charitable organizations—he severed ties with Livestrong to help it survive—and organized competition, even local stuff, is largely closed off to him. "I can't even play table tennis or do archery," he told me. (In March the leader of the International Cycling Union publicly discouraged Armstrong from participating in a charity ride along the Tour route.)

In some ways the head of what was once unofficially known as Lance Inc. seems like any other retired CEO. He occupies his time with one- or two-hour runs (he has not boarded a bicycle since last fall, chiefly because he has to spend three hours atop one to get the same workout), golf and the voracious consumption of magazines, newspapers, TV and movies. He writes letters of support for cancer patients, but he's asked to write far fewer than he once was.





What's Up, Doc? Armstrong volunteered to participate in a follow-up study with Einhorn (above right) who pioneered the cyclist's treatment.

He posts his workouts on Strava, a Web community for runners and cyclists, and on the flight to Indianapolis he closely reviewed the comments that had been uploaded. That morning he had run 10 miles at an average pace of 6:47 a mile. ("Ten heavy," he called it, adding, "Throw 'em down and pick 'em up.") Most of the notes were supportive, but he came across one, posted by a guy in Switzerland, that said in part, "Your [sic] not yet done accounting for the past!" He smiled and flicked his middle finger at the screen.

OUR TESTS done, we hurried to the Indianapolis airport to try and grab an earlier flight back to Austin. Only a couple of years ago Armstrong would have had his Gulfstream IV waiting for him on the tarmac. But the plane, like the fancy lakeside mansion in Austin, had been sold off—"I'm trying to cut the burn rate," he told me.

As he attempts to figure out his future, he has one last big case looming: a federal whistle-blower suit based on former teammate Floyd Landis's claims that the U.S. Postal Service team defrauded the government. The Justice Department is reportedly seeking $100 million from Armstrong and other team leaders.



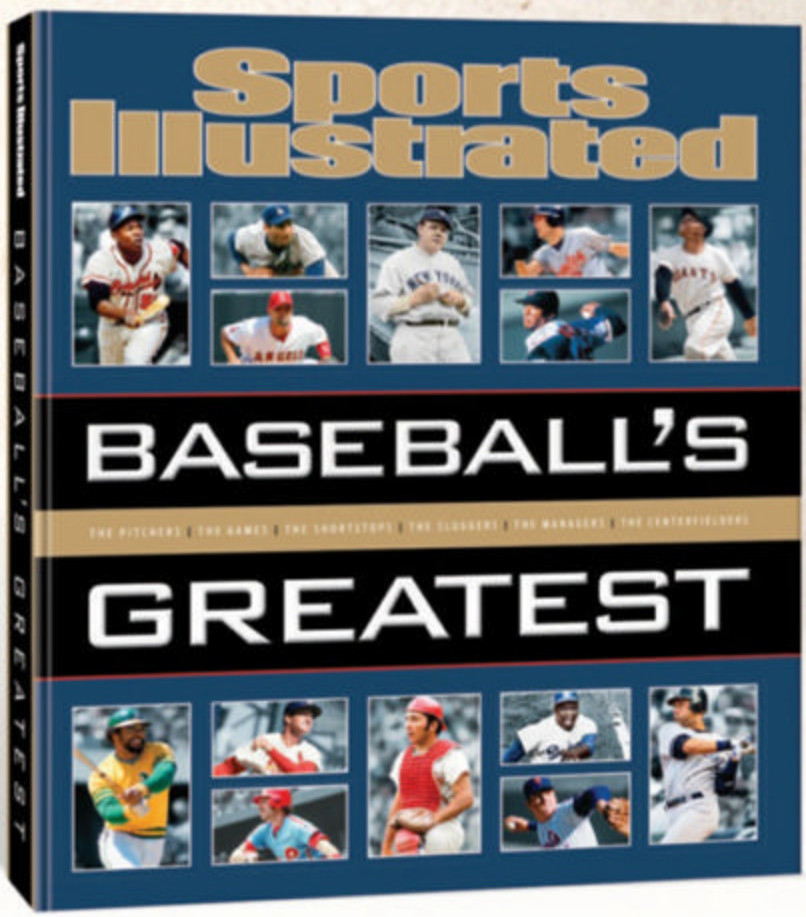
At the gate Armstrong snagged the last standby spot: 16E, a middle seat in coach. I teased him about making friends with his row mates, but he later told me he ended up putting on headphones and watching *Whiplash*, the Oscar-winning movie about a young drummer whose dreams of success are fired up by a ruthless instructor determined to help his prodigy realize his greatness. I pictured Lance, once among the most famous people on the planet, squeezed between two strangers, his baseball cap pulled low, watching the building intensity of the drummer's training. He no doubt could identify with the kid's competitive spirit, yet Armstrong no longer had an outlet, a drum to bang, a cause to champion.

He texted me once more after he landed: "How much did you weigh on that scale? I thought that s--- was way off." □

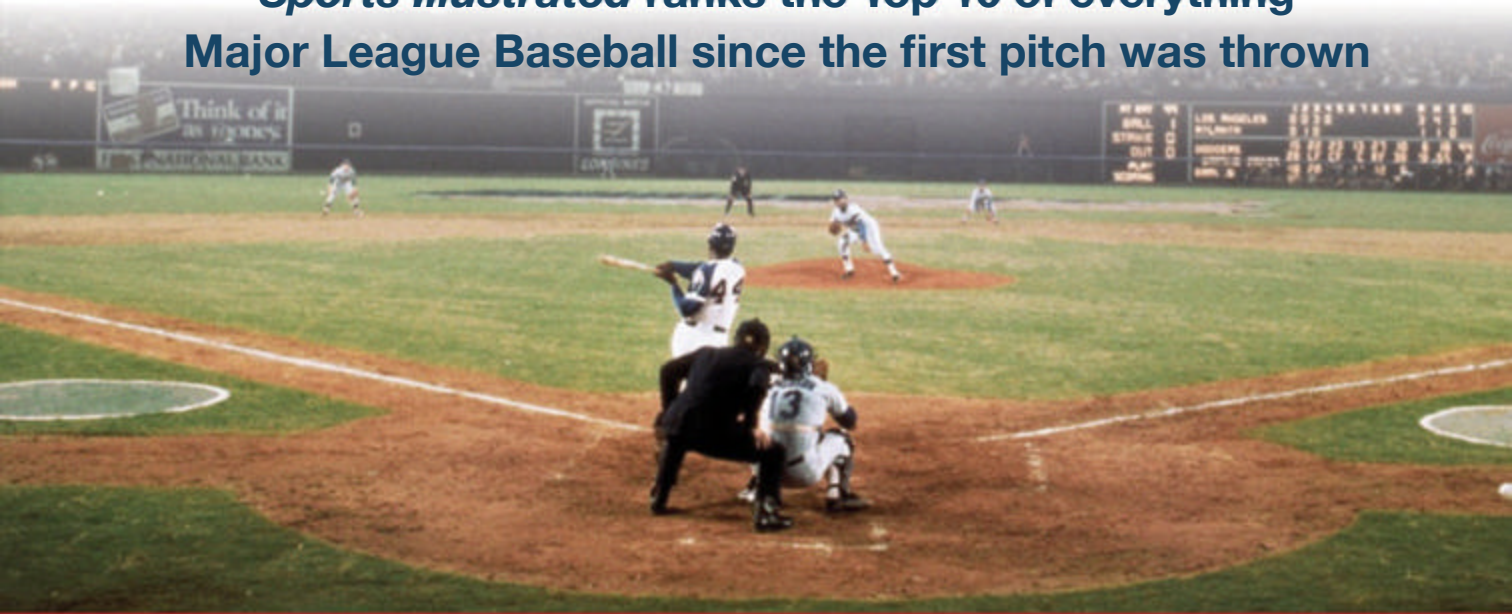
Asher Price is a reporter with the Austin American-Statesman *and the author of* Year of the Dunk: A Modest Defiance of Gravity.

A.J. MAST FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (3)

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TRAINING WITH
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Home Stretch

Kevin Love's yoga helps him on and off the court



KEVIN LOVE SPENDS much of the year on the hardwood, but for chunks of his off-season it's a floor where sneakers are not allowed. Basketballs are replaced with foam blocks, and instead of shouting coaches, Love focuses on the soothing voice of yoga instructor Kent Katich.

"Yoga has given me a newfound balance, strength and endurance," the 6' 10", 240-pound Cavaliers forward says. "And my body has leaned out because of it."

The use of yoga in the NBA isn't cutting edge (Walt Frazier took it up in the '70s), but Katich, who works with dozens of pros, from former NBAer Reggie Miller to soccer star Jermaine Jones, hopes to make the ancient practice mainstream in sports by targeting the needs of individual athletes to improve performance and prevent injuries. For Love, that means flexibility and stretching; for former NFL running back Eddie George, it means a workout that emphasizes strength and explosiveness.

"Kevin's left hip is stiffer than his right because it's his dominant jumping leg," says Katich, who was introduced to Love after the then UCLA freshman saw him working with Warriors guard Andre Iguodala. "We do a lot of hip and gluteal stretching combined with core strength, standing balance poses and breathing."

Love, who incorporates a handful of poses into his in-season workouts, says his go-to pose—"also my least favorite because I have to hold it for one to three minutes"—is the pigeon, a hip-opener that lengthens the piriformis muscle in the glutes.

Katich also emphasizes breathing techniques and mental discipline. "The things that we've built in yoga over the past years are all applicable to basketball," says Love. "For me, yoga is not just a way to keep my body moving, but it also helps me to escape the natural pressures that come from waking up and walking out the door in the morning." To say nothing of those that come from stepping on the court. *—Jamie Lisanti*

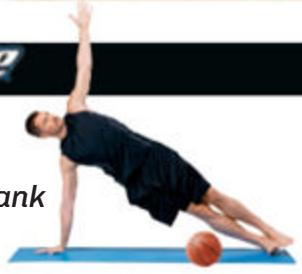
EDGE Presented by edge

Posture Perfect

After 18 years of working with pro athletes, Katich partnered with yoga company Gaiam to create videos that complement a specific sport's training regimen. Here are two poses from Love's flexibility-focused yoga routine.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to *SI.com/trainingwith*

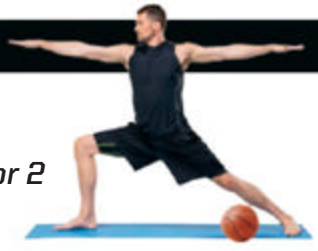
Side plank pose



Start in push-up position. Shift weight to the outside edge of the right foot, then stack the left foot on top. Stretch the left hand toward the ceiling and gaze upward. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and switch sides.

KATICH: ***"The challenge here is for him to maintain isometric strength with his arms extended."***

Warrior 2 pose



Start from a wide stance and turn your right foot 90-degrees to the right. Bend the right knee while keeping the knee over the ankle and raise arms parallel to the floor. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and switch sides.

KATICH: ***"This lengthening pose can strengthen and stretch the ankles and feet."***

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TREND REPORT

Put Me In —*Coach*

IF THREE is a trend, NHL goalie coaches are on the brink. The rule book says, "If both listed goalkeepers are incapacitated, that team shall be entitled to dress and play any available goalkeeper who is eligible." That was the case last Saturday when Bruins backup netminder Niklas Svedberg stepped in for Tuukka Rask, who exited with a migraine in the second period of a 4–2 win over the Rangers. That left no sub for Svedberg, so, after shedding his suit and tie in a Clark Kent quick-change, goalie coach Bob Essensa, 50 *(above)*, paced the Bruins' bench in full pads and a jersey some 13 years removed from his last start. Three weeks earlier Panthers goalie coach Robb Tallas dressed as Florida's emergency goalie in a 3–2 loss to the Leafs. Neither coach ended up taking the ice, which in the Bruins' case was a good thing, laughed head coach Claude Julien: "What a joke." —A.F.



Claire Liu | *Thousand Oaks, Calif.* | *Tennis*

Claire, a freshman at Century Academy, beat Hungary's Fanni Stollar 6–1, 6–3 in the final of the Orlando Women's $10,000 Tournament, held at the Orlando Tennis Centre, to become the youngest female player (14 years, 9 months, 25 days) to win a USTA Pro Circuit event since Anna Kournikova in 1996. Claire is ranked No. 1,215 in the ITF standings.



Ahmed Abdel Khalek | *Cairo, Egypt* | *Squash*

Khalek, a junior at Bates, came back from a 2–0 deficit to defeat Columbia freshman Osama Khalifa 3–2 to take the College Squash Association national title, in Princeton, N.J. The top seed, Khalek extended his winning streak to 42 matches; he last lost in the CSA semifinals in his freshman year. He finished this season 25–0.



Daloria Boone | *Milledgeville, Ga.* | *Track and Field*

Daloria, a freshman at Baldwin High, set two national records for ages 15 to 16 at the Youth Indoor Championships in Landover, Md. Her long jump of 18' 11¼" beat the previous age-group mark by 16 inches, and her 7.18 in the 55-meter dash lowered the record time by .09 of a second. Daloria also won the 200 (25.61) and the 400 (58.53).

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited By **ALEXANDRA FENWICK**



Jaron Brooks | *Lexington, Ky.* | *Track and Field*

Jaron, a junior at Henry Clay High, won the high jump at the New Balance Indoor Nationals in New York City with a leap of 6' 11½". In February he broke the state indoor record with a personal best 7' 1", the top indoor jump in the nation this year. Jaron started high jumping last spring; before this winter he had cleared only 6' 4" in competition.



Mikayla Pivec | *Lynnwood, Wash.* | *Basketball, Track and Field*

Mikayla, a 5' 10" junior wing at Lynnwood High, racked up 31 points and 17 rebounds in a 54–42 victory over Seattle's Cleveland High, the two-time defending state champ, in the Class 3A final. She averaged 20.4 points and 12.1 boards on the season. Mikayla also holds school records in the 800 meters (2:13.5), 1,600 (4:56.1) and javelin (130' 0").



Eric Hsieh | *Laguna Niguel, Calif.* | *Baseball*

Hsieh, a senior first baseman at Yale, was batting .460 through Sunday to lead Division I in hitting. Last week he went 2 for 3 with three walks in an 8–7 extra-inning victory over UMass-Lowell and 5 for 5 with one walk and three RBIs in a 23–8 rout of Hartford. Hsieh also went 5 for 5 in a 9–5 win over Towson in March.

JOHN TLUMACKI/THE BOSTON GLOBE/GETTY IMAGES (ESSENSA); COURTESY USTA (LIU); GREG BORN/BATES COLLEGE (KHALEK); COURTESY OF THE BOONE FAMILY (BOONE); APRIL L. BROOKS (BROOKS); EVERETT EDWARDS (PIVEC); DAVID SILVERMAN (HSIEH)

Nominate Now

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For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow **@SI_Faces** on Twitter.

EXTRA MUSTARD

GO FIGURE



104 Tiger Woods's new World Golf Ranking, marking the first time he's been outside the top 100 since shortly after he turned pro in 1996. Woods, who hasn't competed in nearly two months, spent 683 weeks ranked No. 1 in his career. He has played in only seven events since finishing the Cadillac Championships in March 2014 as the world's top player.

Tiger Woods's World Golf Ranking since being ranked No. 1 in May 2014



Quicken Loans National	PGA Championship	Hero World Challenge	Phoenix Open	Farmers Insurance Open
6/29/14	8/10/14	12/7/2014	2/1/2015	2/8/2015

$200

Amount late North Carolina coach Dean Smith, who died on Feb. 7, left in his will to about 180 of his former Tar Heels lettermen.

16 Rochester Institute of Technology's seed in the 16-team NCAA hockey tournament; last Saturday the Tigers became the first No. 16 to beat a No. 1 seed when they knocked off Minnesota State-Mankato. RIT then lost in the regional final to Nebraska-Omaha.

27 Seasons since the Rangers had played consecutive games without having a power play before last week. New York beat Ottawa and lost to Boston without having a man advantage.

THEY SAID IT

"Mountains. That's it, I guess."

Enes Kanter, Thunder center, who requested a trade from the Jazz earlier this season, when asked what he misses about Utah.





Tom Izzo
Takes a seven seed to his seventh Final Four. At MSU wizard is spelled wIzzord.

HOT NOT



The Knicks
Hit 60 losses for the first time. Awarded *not* status until further notice.

SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE



A closed captioning error on Comast SportsNet during the March 24 76ers-Kings game **ID'd Sacramento guard Nik Stauskas as Sauce Castillo.**

RICK SCUTERI/AP (WOODS); HENZ KLUETMEIER FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (IZZO); PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP (KNICKS); ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (STAUSKAS); RICK BOWMER/AP (KANTER)





JUST MY TYPE

→ *Interview by* **DAN PATRICK**



SCOTT BORAS

MINOR DETAILS

Baseball's most powerful agent understands why the Cubs sent his client, 23-year-old slugger Kris Bryant, down to the minor leagues to start the season—but he's not happy about it.

DAN PATRICK: *If you were running the Cubs, would you keep Bryant in the minor leagues?*

SCOTT BORAS: The issue is, this is not a baseball performance decision. This is an issue based on baseball control. I think the integrity of the game requires we have our best players on the field.

DP: *But you can also say this is a long-term baseball decision.*

SB: I can certainly say that other owners have managed this process differently. I believe the fans don't want to pay for tickets in 2015 knowing the best players are not on the field, knowing that [the plan] is something down the road that's going to help their organization seven years from now. The integrity of the game requires that we do not let advantages to individual clubs get in the way of the overall scope of what Major League Baseball stands for. The best players should play in the big leagues.

DP: *Nobody can force a team to play someone.*

SB: [Chicago manager] Joe Maddon should write his lineup card every day as he sees fit. That should be a managerial and an organizational decision on a daily basis as to who to play. However, it gets rather ridiculous. Why would you not play a guy who is so dominant?

DP: *Does Bryant have a position?*

SB: Of course he does. He's a league-average third baseman. He's very athletic. And he could certainly play the outfield if they so choose.

DP: *He is not on the Opening Day roster. It's because . . .*

SB: I would say the opiate of player control. Teams often manipulate the rules and keep [players] down in the minors for a small period of time and then call them back up, and that gives them another year of control of free agency.

DP: *How much do you want to know about your clients off the field?*

SB: You do your best to know what's going to make a player optimal. I mean optimal in every aspect of his life. It's a difficult process. Each player has his own approach. You certainly don't want to do anything other than aid the player and let him live his normal life.

DP: *Do you care that Alex Rodriguez was taking PEDs when you represented him?*

SB: I never knew anyone that I represented had any involvement with anything like that [while with me]. We developed sports fitness institutes. We have our own training and medical staffs. We give players literature, and we educate them. We don't know everything, but we certainly take precautions. Our company has taken steps beyond what anyone else has. □

GUEST SHOTS
SAY WHAT?



2015 Hall of Fame inductee **John Smoltz** is concerned about how many young pitchers are getting Tommy John surgery. "This is not normal," Smoltz said. "I'm the first-ever Tommy John recipient to go into the Hall of Fame. I can make a very good argument that I'll be the last." . . . Former NBA guard **Steve Smith** told me



it's more important to get along with your teammates in college than in the NBA. "In college you're around each other so much," Smith said. "In the NBA, after two or three weeks he's probably going to get traded or I am." . . . Wisconsin forward



Nigel Hayes used Lakers star Kobe Bryant's locker at Staples Center during the NCAA tournament's West Regional but said his idol left little behind: "Besides his wonderful aura and residue from him being so great? No, nothing other than that."

MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (PATRICK); JAMES DEVANEY/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (BORAS); HEATHER AINSWORTH/AP (SMOLTZ); JOHN AMIS/AP FOR DOVE MEN+CARE (SMITH); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (HAYES)

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A PERIODIC LOOK AT SOME OF THE MOST INTRIGUING RISING STARS

BIG BOARD



LARRY GOREN/FOUR SEAM IMAGES/AP

Thrown Back

Last year Jacob Nix thought he hit it big in the MLB draft. Now he's hoping to hit it bigger

BY STEPHANIE APSTEIN

ON A STILL March afternoon in Texas, Jacob Nix kicks and delivers. Flashing a 94-mph fastball, a hard slider and a sharp curve, he throws six scoreless innings while allowing two base runners and striking out 13. His team holds on for the 7–1 win. It's the kind of performance the Astros had in mind when they selected Nix in the fifth round of the 2014 draft and offered him first-round money.

But Nix is not in Houston. He's 174 miles northwest of Minute Maid Park, at Division III Southwestern University in Austin, playing for the postgrad program at IMG Academy. The guys around him are mostly young strivers taking one last shot at a scholarship after disappointing senior years or kids who played out their high school eligibility but haven't yet graduated.

Most of them only dream of pro ball. Nix, 19, is simply biding his time until he can be drafted again. Last June he became the first player in MLB history to be picked, offered a contract and pass a physical, then have his deal pulled. Nix never envisioned pitching in Texas while the Astros were holding spring training in Florida. But he has no regrets. "After the way things went," he says, "any day of the week I'd take Southwestern over Minute Maid."

NIX WAS ranked as high as the first round on some draft boards heading into his senior season at Los Alamitos (Calif.) High. Major league scouts started coming to his games, and Nix, who committed to UCLA as a sophomore, let it be known that it would take a $1.5 million signing bonus to get him to jilt the Bruins. But Nix says he relied too much on his slider, which caused him to change his delivery to relieve inflammation in his elbow and led to a subpar season (3.16 ERA and a 1.29 WHIP). With the spotty performance and his monetary demands, Nix fell to the first pick in the fifth round, when the Astros took him. Still, as he and his family rushed out to buy Houston hats, Nix thought of the years of 6 a.m. lifts, spring breaks spent at the ballpark and missed parties. "It all paid off," he says. "In that moment it was all worth it."

On June 24, Nix boarded a one-way flight to Houston, where he planned to take his physical, sign his contract and then fly to Kissimmee, Fla., to join the rookie-level Gulf Coast League Astros. At the hotel the Nixes ran into Brady Aiken and his family. The Astros had taken Aiken, a high school lefthander from San Diego, with the first overall pick, and he too was in town for a physical and signing ceremony. The two players, good friends from their days on the 2013 USA Baseball squad that won gold at the U18 World Cup, were set to be introduced together.



Arm and Arm
Teammates for Team USA, Nix (left) and Aiken were each drafted by the Astros.

"AFTER THE WAY THINGS WENT," NIX SAYS, "ANY DAY I'D TAKE SOUTHWESTERN OVER MINUTE MAID."

The next day, after a doctor gave Nix the thumbs-up and welcomed him to the Astros, his family returned to the hotel only to see the Aikens, including Brady, in the lobby with all their luggage. After an hour of confusion, Houston director of amateur scouting Mike Elias summoned the Nixes to a meeting, where Elias explained that the Astros were very excited to have Nix, but there would be no signing. The team needed to work some things out and would be in touch soon.

Nix flew home with his family and tried to get used to something he hated but would become good at: waiting. "I've never been that kind of guy," he says. "I've always been out doing something."

BEFORE THE current collective bargaining agreement took effect in 2012, teams could select college-bound players and throw money at them to entice them to skip school. This led many players to scare off small-market teams—often the ones with the highest picks and most in need of talent—by making it known that they would require a large bonus to sign. To combat the problem, MLB and the players' association agreed to impose a salary slot for each pick position. If a team signs a player for more than his allotted dollar figure, it has to make up the difference by signing one of its other draftees for that much less. There are heavy penalties for going over the limit, and if teams fail to sign a pick, they don't just lose the player—they lose his slotted amount from their pool.

As the top pick Aiken was slotted for $7.9 million, while Nix's fifth-round spot held a value of $370,500. But the Astros had worked out a preliminary deal to sign Aiken for $6.5 million, allowing them to divert $1.4 million to Nix. Everything looked good until Houston's doctors raised concerns about Aiken's UCL. The team dropped its offer to $3.1 million. Aiken declined. If the Astros didn't sign him by 5 p.m. on July 18, they would lose him and his slot money, which meant signing Nix for so far above his slot value would cost them two future first-round picks.

Nix waited three weeks, to the day of the deadline, when he says he got an email from Astros GM Jeff Luhnow with a revised offer: $616,165. Nix passed and, with the backing of the union, filed a grievance—which jeopardized his NCAA eligibility, locking him out of his UCLA scholarship. He spent six months at home, watching *Sons of Anarchy* on Netflix and playing catch in the park.

The grievance dragged until mid-December, when the Nixes and the Astros worked out a settlement. (Both sides refuse comment, but the *Houston Chronicle* has reported that Nix received a six-figure sum.) January came. The NCAA still hadn't ruled

COURTESY OF THE NIX FAMILY

on his eligibility, so Nix enrolled at IMG Academy, a pre-K-through-12 sports-focused prep school in Bradenton, Fla., that also offers camps and postgrad programs and is run by the powerful sports agency.

WHEN NIX first stepped on the mound for IMG, on Feb. 5, he was shocked to see nearly 80 scouts crammed behind the backstop. He didn't disappoint them, tossing four scoreless innings with seven strikeouts against Webber International, an NAIA program.

He's continued to impress, showing an improved curveball thanks to a new grip in which he uses the tip of his index finger to spike the ball. He's also learned that he doesn't have to throw his fastball, which tops out at 97 mph, as hard as he can every time. His mechanics have improved, although he still struggles with consistency of release point at times.

It makes sense that Nix is still learning the craft. He had to sit out a full year when he was 12 due to a congenital back problem, since corrected by surgery, and he played catcher until his freshman year, when his team needed an emergency starter. Nix threw a five-inning no-hitter. You can toss your catcher's gear, the coach told him.

He's not taking classes at IMG, and he was rooming with Aiken, who justified the Astros' concerns about him when he had Tommy John surgery last week. Nix, who will head home in May to work out for teams before the draft, is expected to go in the first round and improve upon last year's bonus offer.

There is one team, though, that won't have him on its draft board. Nix did not sign the papers that would allow Houston to redraft him. "I hear nothing but good things about 29 teams," he says. "I just want to get in and start my career." □

LEGAL NOTICE

Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Economic and Property Damages Settlement

The Deadline to file a Claim is June 8, 2015

June 8, 2015 has been established as the deadline to submit a claim in the Economic and Property Damages ("E&PD") Settlement with BP Exploration & Production Inc. and BP America Production Company ("BP") related to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. So if you are eligible to file a claim, you must act soon.

WHO IS INCLUDED?

The E&PD Settlement Class includes people, businesses, other entities, and properties in the states of Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi, and certain counties in Texas and Florida, that were harmed by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that occurred on April 20, 2010. The website DeepwaterHorizonSettlements.com has detailed descriptions and maps of the included geographic locations to help you determine whether you are a part of the E&PD Settlement Class. Additionally, you can call 1-866-992-6174 or e-mail questions@DeepwaterHorizonEconomicSettlement.com to find out if a geographic location is included.

WHAT ARE THE PAYMENT CATEGORIES?

The settlement provides payments if you had economic loss or property damage because of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. By submitting a claim, you can request a payment in one or more of the following seven categories:

■ Economic Damage ■ Loss of Subsistence ■ Vessel Physical Damage ■ Real Property Sales Damage ■ Vessels of Opportunity Charter Payment ■ Coastal Real Property Damage ■ Wetlands Real Property Damage

Economic Damage payments are available for Individuals and Entities that lost profits or earnings as a result of the Deepwater Horizon Incident. **Coastal Real Property** payments are available for property that was physically damaged in connection with the Deepwater Horizon Incident. Detailed descriptions of all seven categories are available at the website.

There is no limit on the total dollar amount of the E&PD Settlement. All qualified and timely claims will be paid in full once they are approved. The Settlement also allowed for Seafood Compensation claims, but the deadline for those claims has passed.

HOW DO I REQUEST A PAYMENT?

You must submit a Claim Form to request a payment. You can get a copy of the various Claim Forms by visiting the website or by calling 1-866-992-6174. Claims can be submitted online or by mail. If you have questions about how to file your claim, you should call the toll-free number for assistance. The claims process can be complex, so if you are eligible to file a claim, you should act now so you may complete your claim before the **June 8, 2015** deadline.

DeepwaterHorizonSettlements.com ▪ 1-866-992-6174

SHOOTING FOR

A thrilling win lifted Wisconsin into a Final Four that includes a huge favorite, another top seed and a party crasher in green

BY PHIL TAYLOR

Photograph by
John W. McDonough
For Sports Illustrated

IT ALL



DEKKER'S DAGGERS
The Badgers' forward hit five threes in the second half—when he made every shot he took—to help beat Arizona in the Elite Eight for the second straight year.

WHEN SAM DEKKER returned to Wisconsin last fall, he was two inches taller, having grown from 6' 7" to 6' 9", and twice as talkative. Dekker had spent part of his summer playing at a pair of high level camps, the Kevin Durant and LeBron James skills academies, where he had not only impressed pro scouts and fellow players but also honed his trash-talking. In pickup games back on campus Dekker, who was never exactly shy, was even more likely to drill a jumper and let his defender hear about it. "He was like, 'KD talks on the court. I can talk too,' " says sophomore guard Zak Showalter, who added that Dekker's commentary was never mean-spirited. "He had been around a lot of other big-time players and some of it rubbed off."

There's always been something big-time about Dekker, a slashing, sweet-shooting junior forward who, when asked to describe himself as a player, says, "I've got some swagger." He also has a knack for drawing attention from the famous. Most of the world knows by now of his bromance with Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, who was at Staples Center in Los Angeles last weekend to watch the Badgers, the top seed in the West region, beat North Carolina and Arizona to earn a second straight Final Four matchup with Kentucky. He and Rodgers text each other "pretty much every day," Dekker says, shrugging his shoulders as though it's no big deal for a college kid to be buddies with one of the NFL's biggest stars. After Dekker's scorching 20-point second half in the 85–78 win over Arizona last Saturday, when he didn't miss a shot (6 for 6 from the field, including five threes, and 3 for 3 from the foul line), Clippers forward Blake Griffin tweeted his congratulations. Dekker's reply: "Thanks for letting us use Staples for a few days."



BO KNOWS
Ryan (above, right) embraced Dekker's standout performance in L.A. after Kaminsky (right) tossed in a game-high 29 points.

Maybe Dekker seems so comfortable rubbing elbows with the elite because he has been a celebrity in Wisconsin since his days at Sheboygan Area Lutheran High, where he was not just a star—earning the state's player of the year honors in 2012—but a legend, thanks to his game-winning three-pointer with five seconds left in the '12 Class 5 championship game. Rivals.com ranked him the 13th in the country as a senior, and he arrived in Madison with the weight of his state's expectations on his shoulders. Dekker was supposed to be the All-America and player of the year candidate that 7-foot forward Frank Kaminsky has become.



JOHN W. MCDONOUGH FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (2)



Maybe Dekker is comfortable rubbing elbows with the elite because he's been a celebrity in Wisconsin since his days at Sheboygan Area Lutheran High.

Instead he has been Kaminsky's second banana, good but not great, and the Wisconsin faithful have sometimes expressed their disappointment. When a sprained left ankle limited him early this season—he scored five points or fewer in games against Boise State, Alabama-Birmingham, Duke and Marquette—the criticism intensified. "I heard a lot of stuff," Dekker says. " 'What's wrong with Sam? Why isn't he the player we thought? He's gotten worse.' You've just got to go on with a smile and plug through it. They don't understand everything." As much as he tries to downplay it, it's clear that Dekker, who is the Badgers' second-leading scorer with 13.9 points per game, felt unfairly maligned. The Drake lyric he chose for his Twitter bio expresses his true feelings: "They scream out my failures and whisper my accomplishments."

Teammates who are also Wisconsin natives appreciate Dekker's dilemma best. "It was a big deal when he decided to stay in state," says Showalter, who is from Germantown. "And then it was like people expected him to be, I don't know, superhuman." Now, with a healthy ankle and renewed confidence, Dekker is coming closer to that level, displaying an all-around game that is expected to make him a first-round pick in this June's NBA draft. He was named the West's Most Outstanding Player after his two nearly flawless games. In addition to his 27 points against the Wildcats, Dekker poured in 23 in the 79–72 defeat of the Tar Heels, including 15 in the first half as Kaminsky struggled.

Dekker's performance against Arizona, which included a game-clinching rainbow three-pointer from the right wing with 20 seconds left—almost the exact spot as his high school title-winning shot—set Twitter ablaze and made it seem likely that he will again be the toughest Badger for Kentucky to defend in the national semifinals. In the Wildcats' 74–73 win over Wisconsin in last year's Final Four, they were able to contain Kaminsky, who scored only eight points, but Dekker still had 15.

Notre Dame nearly shocked undefeated Kentucky in the Elite Eight last Saturday largely by spreading the floor, which opened the middle for the Irish to attack off the dribble. Wisconsin is capable of approaching the Wildcats' defense the same way, and no Badger is more suited to that strategy than Dekker. In making just four of 14 three-point attempts, Notre Dame was unable to supplement its drive-and-kick game with long-range accuracy. Dekker can, and his versatility will be a challenge for Kentucky. Play off him to take away the drive, and he could go on another three-point spree. Play him tight, and he has the quickness and strength to finish at the rim. "Sometimes I don't use my athleticism the way I should," the 230-pound Dekker says. "When I'm using it to my advantage, it makes the game come a lot more naturally." Wisconsin coach Bo Ryan often reminds him of exactly that. "I've been known to prod," Ryan says, in a tone that indicates that the prodding sometimes comes with the volume cranked up.

There should be no extra encouragement needed on Saturday, when the Badgers will get the chance to topple the mighty Cats and atone for a loss that has been gnawing at them for a year. "When I committed, Coach Ryan said to me that we want to get to Final Fours and we want to bring championships to Wisconsin, and now we're one step closer," Dekker said after beating Arizona. If he helps the Badgers take the final two steps in Indianapolis, that accomplishment will be screamed, not whispered.



MIDWEST REGIONAL

IT'S A MATTER OF MINUTES

As Kentucky has shifted to a performance-based model, Karl-Anthony Towns has emerged as its prime-time threat

BY LUKE WINN



DAVID E. KLUTHO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

HUNGER GAMES
A tougher, more efficient Towns is gobbling up possessions for the Wildcats.

JOHN CALIPARI's manifesto on allocation of postseason playing time was distributed to millions of homes by CBS, via a halftime interview on the first day of the NCAA tournament. "This is not communism," the Kentucky coach said. "You've gotta perform."

The 38-0 Wildcats are vying to become the first undefeated national champion since Indiana in 1976 in large part because they sacrificed individual playing time and shot attempts for the greater good. The platoon system that Calipari devised to accommodate his overstuffed, ultratalented roster—playing two five-man units for around 20 minutes each—was founded on his principle that "everybody's trying to eat." The beginnings of Kentucky's juggernaut were communist, but a December left ACL tear to junior wing Alex Poythress forced Calipari to reassess platooning; eventually he settled on a nine-man rotation with less wholesale subbing. Now he rides certain players, or combinations of players, based his perception of their energy and engagement. And during the NCAA tournament some Wildcats are eating far more than others.

Karl-Anthony Towns, Kentucky's 6' 11" freshman center and potentially the No. 1 pick in the June NBA draft, needed time to acclimate to college after moving from Piscataway, N.J., to Lexington last summer. The 19-year-old missed the traditional chicken-and-rice dish his Dominican-born mother, Jacqueline Cruz, often made, and he got flustered by physical play, both in practice and in games. The current version of Towns looks sated and mostly unflappable. He's not "crying like a baby anymore" over fouls, freshman guard Tyler Ulis says, and he's also feasting on post feeds. Towns staved off Notre Dame's upset bid in the Elite Eight by scoring a career-high 25 points and shooting 8 for 8 on low-block attempts in the second half. Kentucky's regular-season offense was a balanced arrangement in which Towns used 23.3% of the team's possessions, but during the tournament he has been using 28.3%, with a team-high efficiency rating of 127.2. The onetime role player now handles as big a portion of Kentucky's offense as Frank Kaminsky, SI's national player of the year, does for Wisconsin.

While the Wildcats rode Towns to beat the Irish 68-66, they also demoralized West Virginia 78-39 in the Sweet 16 even though he only scored one point. Kentucky has the luxury of backup plans for its backup plans. The most Big Dance minutes (about 28 per game) have gone to its two best defenders, Ulis and 7-footer Willie Cauley-Stein, and they're joined on the court by whoever's clicking offensively. The Harrison twins, sophomore guards Aaron and Andrew, can play small roles early in a game and then assert themselves in the highest-pressure situations, and freshman forward Trey Lyles and freshman shooting guard Devin Booker, as well as sophomore center Dakari Johnson, can provide occasional scoring infusions. "What makes us unique," Calipari says, is that "there's no pressure on you to play great." So the spirited get minutes, and the sluggish sit. And the Wildcats keep on winning.

EAST REGIONAL

ONE FOR THE ROAD

Confronted with doubts, injuries and a frightening illness, guard Travis Trice stayed the course—then guided Michigan State to the ultimate destination

BY DAN GREENE

Photograph by
Al Tielemans
For Sports Illustrated

HERE WAS one of March's familiar sights, a senior sobbing on the court after an NCAA tournament game, his mind and body overcome with memories of the path he had traveled. That Travis Trice was on the winning side of Michigan State's fist-tight 76–70 overtime defeat of Louisville on Sunday in Syracuse illustrated the arduousness of his journey, one filled with pain, doubt and the fear that he wouldn't live to see his senior year. For nearly a minute the 6-foot point guard crouched while each of his parents rubbed a heaving shoulder. He stopped only when he was summoned to the stage for the East Regional trophy presentation. Even after accepting Most Outstanding Player honors, he lingered blank-faced behind his smiling teammates as they mugged for the media horde, his hands folded atop his shaking head and his eyes drifting skyward. "He thinks he's not worthy," said Trice's mother, Julie. "But Travis is so worthy of this time. He really is."

If Trice's tears were unanticipated—Spartans forward Branden Dawson, his friend since seventh grade, had never seen Trice cry—so was his ascent. Trice's pedigree is impressive: His father, also named Travis, starred as a 6' 1" point guard for Butler in the early 1990s, and his 5' 10" maternal grandfather, Bob Pritchett, was honorable mention All-America at Old Dominion. But as a 5' 10", 150-pound 11th-grader, little Travis was deemed too slight for power-conference basketball by the recruiting services, which gave him a three-star grade. Skeptics attributed his success on the AAU circuit to playing with five- or four-star teammates like Dawson and future Michigan star Mitch McGary, and his heroics for Wayne High in his hometown of Huber Heights, Ohio, to playing for his father. "He never really got credit for who he was," says the elder Trice, who has coached Wayne since 2007.

What naysayers missed was a kid who had obsessively learned the high-arcing angles and space-creating step-backs that had fueled his father's crafty, undersized game. As a six-year-old Trice was such a savvy competitor that he nearly forced the Huber Heights YMCA to change a rule dictating that no player be guarded outside a painted line 15 feet from the basket; possession after possession Trice would dribble to a spot just beyond the boundary and launch a shot, rendering himself unguardable. His family still laughs when they watch the footage of those early games.

In the summer of 2010, Spartans coach Tom Izzo was scouting Dawson at a tournament in Milwaukee, but he grew so smitten with the point guard setting up the star's scores that he began recruiting Trice personally instead of delegating the job to an assistant. "He had a little swagger to him, a little chip on his shoulder," says Izzo, a former walk-on and assistant at Division II Northern Michigan. "I saw a little bit of myself in him. His chances of playing at this level were like my chances of getting this job: slim to none."

Once in East Lansing, Trice's slender body betrayed him in unexpected ways. In the May after his freshman season—in which he was hampered by a high right ankle sprain—Trice began sleeping past noon and spending his waking hours in a haze of fatigue. After tests for mono came back negative, a litany of blood work, MRIs and CAT scans over the next two months led doctors to think that he had some kind of a virus in his brain. With no diagnosis and thus no treatment, Trice slept away his summer, shedding 20 hard-earned pounds as his eyes darkened with heavy rings. Questions about his future on the court gave way to more grave concerns. "There was a point," says Trice, "where I was like, Man, am I about to die?"

Trice still doesn't know what ailed him. Nor can he explain what happened in August 2012, when he began to slowly regain his strength and energy. That

GREEN MACHINE
Trice piled up 17 points and five assists against Louisville and Terry Rozier (far left) on Sunday, propelling the seventh-seeded Spartans to a Final Four in Indy flush with No. 1s.

November he played in the season opener but sustained a concussion that caused him to miss five games; two months later he suffered a second concussion and was out for another four. As a junior he averaged 22.3 minutes off the bench despite playing most of the season with an infected blister inside of another blister on his left foot. "I don't know a whole lot of people who can continue to get back up in those situations," says his father. "Sometimes you think about throwing in the towel. But not only has he bounced back, he's better than he's ever been."

This season Trice had just one notable setback: a January rib injury that coincided with a shooting slump and temporary shift out of the starting lineup. At that point the Spartans too were out of whack, with a bubble-worthy résumé featuring a mediocre 6–4 Big Ten record. In the nearly two months since they have developed into yet another Izzo postseason success story, nearly nabbing the Big Ten tournament title from Wisconsin and storming into Indianapolis as a No. 7 seed and this Final Four's most unexpected guest.

If the Spartans can get past Duke in the national



SOUTH REGIONAL

JUSTISE FOR ALL

Duke's do-everything forward has come up big in a variety of ways at the most crucial moments

BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

AS JUSTISE WINSLOW cut down a net at NRG Stadium on Sunday, he flashed a hand signal to the crowd. It was an *H*, for Houston, where Duke earned a Final Four bid and where Winslow was raised. It would have not been surprising if the 6' 6" freshman forward had used another hand to hold the scissors, a third to steady the net and a fourth to pull an elderly lady's cat out of a tree. He was everywhere all weekend. Winslow easily could have won the South Regional's Most Outstanding Player award that went to point guard Tyus Jones, a fellow freshman. Winslow is that rare player who has one-and-done talent but senior savvy.

His role for Duke is similar to the one that 6' 7" forward Michael Kidd-Gilchrist played for 2012 national champion Kentucky. He's not the purest shooter, but he is a manic defender who rebounds and drives with such ferocity that he collapses defenses and often ends up

WINSLOW, HOMER

The more than 100 friends and family members who turned out in Winslow's native Houston on Sunday saw the freshman deliver key blows to the Zags.

GREG NELSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (WINSLOW)

semifinal on Saturday, it will likely be due to continued clutch scoring from Trice, who is averaging a team-best 19.8 points in the tournament, including 24 in a 62–58 Sweet 16 win over Oklahoma. Whatever Indy might have in store, Trice's postseason magic has already earned him a place in Michigan State lore. When he finally left the court after Sunday's postgame celebration, he was stopped by the school's alpha legend. As the two hugged, Magic Johnson echoed Julie Trice's sentiments: "You deserve it."

at the free throw line. (He went 8 for 9 from the stripe in victories over Utah and Gonzaga.) Winslow is averaging an efficient 14.0 points in the tournament, along with 9.5 rebounds, 1.8 blocks and 1.5 steals.

"He does so many little things that make his game special," said Winslow's father, Rickie, as he snapped photos of Duke's celebration from the stands. "It's because he worked very hard and developed on his own. There's some genes there, but he had to develop as well."

The genes are Rickie's. As the proud dad pointed out, the Winslows are the first father-son duo to earn McDonald's All-American honors and then play in the Final Four. Rickie played for Houston's Phi Slamma Jamma teams, and like Justise, he made it to the tournament's last weekend as a freshman, in 1984.

Justise says that one of the Blue Devils' strengths is that, "In all the big games, big moments, it doesn't matter who's stepping up. No one is scared of that big moment." That may be true. But Winslow takes it a step further. He has a habit of doing exactly what Duke needs at the precise moment Duke needs it.

In the Blue Devils' tournament opener, Robert Morris cut the margin to 10 with 11:56 left. Winslow responded with a three-pointer, a rebound, a layup, another rebound and an assist on a three-pointer to effectively end the game himself. In the Sweet 16 the Utes cut Duke's lead to six with 4:05 left. Winslow responded with a three-point play to key a 63–57 victory.

And when Gonzaga came within two points with 5:43 left on Sunday, Winslow scored the game's next seven points in a 66–52 win. The Blue Devils now go from the *H* to the Izzo: a Final Four date with coach Tom Izzo and Michigan State.

DAVID E. KLUTHO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (MASCOTS)

SCOUTS' TAKES

MIDWEST VS. WEST

KENTUCKY

Defensively they do a good job of staying home on the shooters, and they're very versatile—[7-foot] Willie Cauley-Stein can guard a point guard to a five man. The most important thing is, Can you get control of the game? Can you live with some two-pointers going in and really control their shooters? Trey Lyles is their x-factor. He can make shots from inside the arc; he can put it on the floor; they'll post him a little bit. He's really a four man playing the three spot, so he's a matchup nightmare.

WISCONSIN

They beat you in the last 10 seconds of the shot clock, after you've defended for the entire possession and you think you've shut them down. Don't go crazy trying to double or help on Frank Kaminsky, because most of their other guys can't hurt you if you stay home on them. Interior D is their biggest weakness because they have no shot blocker, so attacking the middle is a must. It's not easy to beat their guards off the dribble, but if you move the ball and open up driving lanes, you can cause them problems.



DUKE VS. KENTUCKY

The Wildcats swarm Okafor, getting him into foul trouble early. Karl-Anthony Towns has another huge game, ensuring Kentucky's perfect season.



SOUTH VS. EAST

DUKE

You have to have your Jahlil Okafor plans. You can guard him one-on-one and take away everybody else's three-point looks. You can bring double teams to get the ball out of his hands and see if they can make enough threes. You have to be willing to do either one. You also have to have your plan for how you attack their pressure-switching defense. You can post up the switches, and if you have a big guy who can get off scoring shots, Okafor will let you catch the ball. You have to pressure him to foul.

MICHIGAN STATE

Keep them out of transition—they get deep outlets and come at you hard—and off the offensive glass. In the half-court they run a ton of sets; you watch 10 games, you might see them run the same play twice. You just have to look for tendencies. They're unique in that they run those off-ball screens, and they're really good with pin downs. Their D is typical Michigan State. What they do really well is give a quick hedge and recover. If it gets into a half-court slugfest, they're going to be physical and hard to score on.



ALL RA

GATHERING STEAM
As he brings the ball up, Westbrook prepares his plan of attack—"My mind-set is, I can get by anybody in front of me"—and girds himself for the second line of the defense.

Photographs by
Greg Nelson
For Sports Illustrated



PRO BASKETBALL

Russell Westbrook knows only one way to play: full force, every time. Channeling that passion has helped him to an MVP-caliber season. But you still don't want to get in his way

THE

GE

BY LEE JENKINS

WESTBROOK

WHEN RUSSELL WESTBROOK finishes the orange wedges, the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and the Taylor Swift and Katy Perry songs, he sits swaddled in white towels, his terry-cloth cocoon. He stretches out over two chairs in the Thunder locker room, his iPod with its eclectic playlist resting on his right thigh, and lets the metamorphosis unfold. "He doesn't talk," says guard Anthony Morrow. "He doesn't blink. He turns into Maniac Russ." He stares at a wall-mounted TV flashing video of that night's opponent. Teammates try to engage him. "But he's somewhere else," Morrow says. They ask questions and then reconsider: "You know what, man, it's nothing," says second-year center Steven Adams. They follow him to the floor, where the transformation is completed. "The ball goes up," Adams says, "and he becomes a beast."

Before Westbrook blossomed into America's fast-twitch phenomenon, before he piled up triple doubles at a rate that recalls Oscar Robertson, before he could do virtually everything on a basketball court—leading the NBA in scoring, ranking fourth in assists and second in steals through last Saturday—he could do only one thing. "I wasn't that good," Westbrook says, "but I played hard." When he was a junior at Leuzinger High in Lawndale, Calif., the age by which most headliners have already been anointed, he couldn't dunk. He couldn't shoot. The only interested college was San Diego. An honor-roll student, he believed an academic scholarship was more attainable. "I have one friend," Westbrook told himself before games, "and that's this ball." He had to seize it, cradle it, compel it to carry out his will.

In 2004, UCLA hosted a small-time AAU event that Bruins coaches were not allowed to attend. But a tournament organizer charged into the basketball office at the Morgan Center and hollered, "There's some little 5' 10" kid flying around Pauley Pavilion like a bat out of hell!" That was Russell Westbrook, bat out of hell. Much has changed since then—his body, his style, his stat line—but not his spirit. He is still the 16-year-old striver whose parents worked at a bread factory and a school cafeteria. On the balcony of the family's South L.A. apartment, they installed a dip bar over a sandbox, and Westbrook did pull-ups until his arms throbbed. He grew into a spring-loaded UCLA sophomore who declared for the draft and tried to break the rim in his audition with the then Sonics. "His wrists," says trainer Rob McClanaghan, "were red afterward." Where Westbrook once bounced off gym walls as a way to inspire his younger brother, Raynard, he now works up the same lather because the sports world is watching, waiting, holding its breath for the kinetic feats of Maniac Russ.

"There are many times throughout a season that you





may not feel like playing," says Westbrook, 26. "You may not want to play on this night, or against this team. But I don't feel that way. This is one of the best jobs in the world, and you never know how long you'll be able to do it—how long you'll be able to run like this and jump like this. So I go for it. I go for it every time. It may look angry, but it's the only way I know."

He grabs a rebound or accepts an outlet pass and reduces myriad options to one. "Attack," he tells himself. He hears opposing coaches bark, "Load up," and he realizes reinforcements are coming. "That doesn't stop me," he says. "That makes me go after it even more. I want to mess up their game plan." At half-court he takes a mental snapshot of the floor. The first defender might as well go grab a swig of Gatorade. "My mind-set is, I can get by anybody in front of me," says Westbrook. He is focused on the next line of defense, which will pressure him into a decision. Does he pull up at the elbow for the 15-footer he calls his "cotton shot" because it's so comfortable? Does he kick out for the three-point snipers who are panting to keep up with him? Or does he summon all his fury and hurdle whatever giant awaits on the back line? "I have fears," Westbrook says, "but I do not fear anything or anybody on the court."

He stands only 6' 3", but he packs 200 tightly coiled pounds onto that modest frame, and he can finish violently on both sides of the hoop because he is essentially ambidextrous. He writes and eats with his left hand, shoots and throws with his right. Both arms are striped with scars acquired from collisions in the lane. By the time he reaches the basket he looks ready to combust, face contorted into a delirious grimace. "I used to hold in my emotions and then I'd have one big outburst," Westbrook says. "Letting them go helps me move forward." Later he will watch himself on video and see a stranger, screaming, chest-thumping, brandishing imaginary pistols. "A crazy man," Westbrook says. "I don't even know what I'm doing." When he walks to the free throw line, he reminds himself to breathe: "After an and-one, I'm screaming so loud and my adrenaline is so high, I can't really calm down."

SOAR POINT

Though he doesn't like to be perceived as angry or out of control, Westbrook's fiery attitude has fueled depleted Oklahoma City in its playoff drive.

The wrath of Westbrook is contagious. "He plays with a rage," says Thunder small forward Kevin Durant, "that ignites this whole team, this whole arena." Westbrook has stirred Oklahoma City since he entered the NBA six years ago, but he was often dismissed as Durant's roguish sidekick, chided for stealing shine from a superior.

Now, with Durant out for the rest of the season because of a lingering right-foot injury that requires bone-graft surgery and power forward Serge Ibaka recovering from a right-knee operation, Westbrook is enrapturing the league and dragging the Thunder to the playoffs by the scruff of their neck. He is on pace to average more than 27 points, eight assists and seven rebounds, a threshold that has been eclipsed only by Michael Jordan, LeBron James and Robertson. Before the All-Star Game at Madison Square Garden, the Big O called him over. "I told him he's a helluva player," Robertson says. Westbrook scored 41 points in 26 minutes that night, winning MVP, and he averaged a triple double in his first 10 games after the break. "I've seen others with the same size and physicality," Robertson says. "But they don't have his determination."

GAME FACE

Last season Westbrook played half a game despite a torn meniscus; this year he put up a triple double a week after suffering a broken cheekbone.

When Westbrook tore the meniscus in his right knee during the second quarter of a playoff game two years ago, he still worked the second half, scoring 16 points. "I guess I did feel something," he acknowledges. When he broke a bone in his right cheek in February in a collision with a teammate's knee, he underwent surgery the next day and returned less than a week later, racking up 49 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists while wearing a plastic mask with straps that come unhinged every time Westbrook does. He fidgets endlessly with the mask, but the truth is that he likes it. "We're talking about a guy with the athleticism of LeBron and the drive of Kobe," says an opposing head coach. "That's an intimidating enough combination, and then you put that mask on him, he's something out of a movie."

Westbrook's superpower is hard to measure or define. Nick Collison probably comes closest. "His give-a-f---level," the Thunder forward says, "is very, very high." Westbrook's passion is a powerful tool, which when harnessed can be empowering and when unchecked can be isolating. "I'm so emotional and I want to win so badly that it can backfire," Westbrook says. "Controlling it, using it to my advantage, has been the challenge."

COLLEGE COACHES who scouted Westbrook at Leuzinger High in the mid-2000s found reasons not to recruit him. *Small . . . inconsistent . . . immature . . . chicken without a head.* Kerry Keating heard all the critiques. "Who gives a s---," Keating thought. "Nobody will ever stay in front of him." Keating, then a UCLA assistant and currently the Santa Clara coach, faced little competition for Westbrook. The Bruins landed him even though they couldn't offer a scholarship until the spring of his senior year.

Westbrook logged two seasons at UCLA, and in his last game the Bruins fell to Memphis at the Final Four. The Sonics, about to become the Thunder, invited several Memphis stars to predraft workouts and asked their opinion of UCLA's many prospects; the Tigers unanimously called Westbrook the toughest. The franchise picked Westbrook fourth in '08, fully aware that he wasn't



a traditional point guard, and also aware that the days of the traditional point guard were numbered. Still, some tenets of the position—passing, playmaking, elevating the whole—would endure and have to be learned.

Oklahoma City vets laugh at modern-day characterizations of Westbrook as a runaway train, because this is actually the restrained version. They remember what he could be like before, charging headlong into the key, partaking in one-on-one battles that undermined the team concept, growing irate with referees and forgetting to run back on defense. Many young players succumb to similar pitfalls, but Westbrook came of age in prime time, with the Thunder a fixture in the postseason and on national TV. His foibles made easy fodder for talk shows. "There were times he'd get in his own world," Collison says, "and it was hard to calm him down."

Anybody who dropped a pass or blew an assignment could be subjected to the scowl. "Every time he looked at me," says Adams, "I just apologized."

Last fall Westbrook watched a video of his reactions to plays positive and negative. He noticed how the Thunder responded to his body language for better and worse. "Let's say a teammate turns it over, and I'm screaming and moving my hands, you can see in his face that he let me down," Westbrook explains. "And then, on the next play, you can see the lack of confidence." The opposite was also true. When he celebrated a teammate for hitting a shot, another bucket often ensued. "I saw how my energy can bring the group very high or very low," Westbrook says. "It was a huge thing for me, a great thing." He shared his observations with coach Scott Brooks, a former point guard. "Even if the guy should have caught the pass, you have to take the heat," Brooks says. "You have to take the blame. You have to tell him, 'My bad.' "

The Thunder started this season 3–12, with Westbrook recovering from a broken right hand, perched on the bench next to Durant. "That gave me an opportunity to sit back and see the game from a different view, see life from a different view," Westbrook says. "Your team is losing, down and out, confidence is low. I wanted to make them feel better." He has lifted OKC in ways both obvious and intangible. When center Enes Kanter fumbles a perfect post feed, Westbrook points at himself; Kanter, acquired at the trade deadline from the Jazz, is averaging a career-high 17.6 points with the Thunder. When Morrow misses some three-pointers, Westbrook meets with the marksman over breakfast and discusses ways to set him up; Morrow is shooting 52.1% from three since the break. "Two years ago I'd have been shaking my head," Westbrook says. "That's a huge part of my growth." The 21-year-old Adams is even approaching him at stoppages. "You can talk to him on the court, which is cool," Adams says. "You just have to time it right."

No one of sound mind would want to mollify him completely. The personal vendettas Westbrook manufactures against random opponents—Raptors guard Greivis Vasquez, be afraid—are legend in Oklahoma City. He gives the Thunder a psychological edge not unlike what the Ravens enjoyed with middle linebacker Ray Lewis. They know they're riding with the baddest dude in the room, and he is firmly on their side, dispensing his jet fuel.

Westbrook has always dazzled the Thunder with his aptitude, since the early days when they practiced at Southern Nazarene University and he interrupted drills to tell power forwards where they should stand. Back then Westbrook was an attack guard. Then he was an attack guard who dropped off passes for big men. Then he was an attack guard who kicked out for three-pointers. Today he is an attack guard who creates for everyone.

The trick has been expanding his game without halting it. Most classic playmakers operate at a deliberate pace, allowing them to survey the floor and find cutters. Westbrook's speed compromises his vision, which is why he takes those mental snapshots at half-court, enabling him to anticipate how possessions will unfold. "He's thinking, If I make this move, what's my next step, my next read; what will the picture look like then?" says Thunder assistant Robert Pack. Anybody who drives 100 miles per hour all the time gets in some accidents—Westbrook coughs up 4.4 turnovers per game—but he is cautious by his breakneck standards. "Instead of going right by you, which is what he always used to do, he does sometimes slow down," says McClanaghan, who has trained Westbrook since he was a freshman at UCLA. "Then he goes right by you."

Westbrook is a terror, a dervish, a demon. He hears these hyperbolic descriptors all the time. He doesn't necessarily appreciate them.

BY THE NUMBERS

27.5
Westbrook's points per game through Saturday, best in the NBA, edging out James Harden and LeBron James

9
Triple doubles for Westbrook this season—including four in a row—the most since Jason Kidd's 13 in 2007–08

29.3
Westbrook's Player Efficiency Rating (PER), second only to the Pelicans' Anthony Davis, who has a 31.1

48.3
Westbrook's league-best assist percentage, or the estimated percentage of his teammates' field goals that he set up

WESTBROOK SQUEEZES himself into a third-grade chair at Eugene Field Elementary School and reflects on the hotly contested race for the trophy he has eyed since training camp. "It's been one of my main goals all season," he says. "I want it." There are more predicable candidates, but he continues undaunted in his pursuit of the NBA's J. Walter Kennedy Citizenship Award. He may have a better shot at MVP, but before rejecting his Kennedy candidacy based on postgame interviews Marshawn Lynch would

find chilly, consider that Westbrook's Why Not? Foundation has created reading rooms at three Oklahoma City elementary schools this season and launched a reading challenge in which students from 78 local schools compete to read for the most minutes.

The ball is not his only friend, not even close. Westbrook is beloved in the Thunder's headquarters for attending the hockey games, soccer matches and piano recitals of staffers' children. Every year he sends a pair of Air Jordans and a Jordan-brand sweat suit to each employee. He can be warm ("Get me out there with those people," he told team p.r. boss Matt Tumbleson after the devastating tornado in '13, when the guard was still relegated to a wheelchair because of the meniscus) and funny ("Congratulations on your daughter's birth," he messaged Tumbleson. "I hear her name is Russellena"). He teaches himself guitar. He handles his own bills. He is never late. But he keeps most personal details concealed. Westbrook is admittedly slow to trust and maintains an inner circle smaller than a keyhole. He met his fiancée, Nina Earl, when she too played basketball at UCLA. Raynard attends the University of Oklahoma and wants to go into broadcast journalism. Russell and Raynard are inseparable with their parents, Russell Sr. and Shannon, still back in L.A.



ON THE CLOCK

Durant (left) and Westbrook have each carried the team in the other's absence, but with free agency looming, they're running out of time to shine together.

Celebrities often change away from cameras and tape recorders, but with Westbrook, the contrast is profound. His raspy voice, short and terse during press briefings, suddenly becomes the loudest and liveliest in the room. "People who don't know me probably think I'm mad all the time, and with the way I play, they have a point," he says. "But I'm not Angry Man off the court. I'm a laid-back chill guy." Given his brazen wardrobe choices, which prompted Barneys New York to sign him as a designer, you'd assume he doesn't care what the public thinks. But that's not accurate either. He resents the madman portrayals. He distances himself from Maniac Russ. "It upsets me when little kids hear, 'He's so aggressive, you can't contain him,' " Westbrook says. "My mom hears that, my family hears it, and it makes me seem like I have no control over what I'm doing."

Robertson will not liken his skill set to Westbrook's, but he does compare their plight. "For years I heard I was a hard guy to know and I had a chip on my shoulder," Robertson says, "because I didn't go on television a lot and I didn't talk to people I didn't know." The Thunder understand Westbrook. They resist every opportunity to edit him. They embrace his 15-footers from the elbow, even though the analytics don't, because they realize those cotton shots enable dunks and corner threes. "When we're rolling," Brooks says, "that shot opens up everything." The unfortunate side note to Westbrook's recent binge is that it's been made possible by Durant's absence. Last season, with Westbrook sidelined, Durant reeled off 30 points or more in 12 straight games. This spring it is Westbrook's turn, and he is at the height of his powers. "I don't know if it's the height," he clarifies, "or the beginning." Next year Durant will be an unrestricted free agent, and the year after, Westbrook will follow. The clock ticks in Oklahoma City, but Durant is undergoing his third foot surgery in the past six months, suspending championship hopes once again. In 2013 the Thunder missed Westbrook in the playoffs. In '14 it was Ibaka. Now Durant stands wistfully under the basket at timeouts, hoisting layups in his blazer.

For the moment he has ceded the marquee to Westbrook, who is sitting in his newest reading room at Eugene Field. He has arrived, early as usual, in a gray scoop-neck shirt and tight black pants cut off at the calf. He has sliced another red ribbon with oversized scissors. He has spotted his picture on the wall, fists clenched, eyes aflame. Now he is holding a book called *I Like Myself*, which the school selected for two third-graders to take turns reading aloud.

I may be called a silly nut
or crazy cuckoo bird—so what?
I'm having too much fun, you see,
for anything to bother me!
Even when I look a mess,
I still don't like me any less,
'cause nothing in this world, you know,
can change what's deep inside, and so . . .
No matter if they stop and stare,
no person
ever
anywhere
can make me feel that what they see
is all there really is to me. □


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NFL 2015
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED
DRAFT
PREVIEW

Man of the Moment

Two years ago, when everyone was going gaga over the spread, Garrett Grayson may not have registered with NFL draftniks. But now? As the well-documented pro problems of spread guys raise questions about the likes of Marcus Mariota, Grayson just might be the right guy at the right time

BY GREG BISHOP

Photograph by
Todd Rosenberg
For Sports Illustrated

ON THE second floor of the Omni Hotel in downtown Indianapolis, NFL aspirants munch on cheese sandwiches with the crusts carefully cut off. Waitresses serve made-to-order smoothies. Barbers stand by for haircuts, and a mammoth security guard protects a room stocked with free shoes.

Garrett Grayson isn't sure what to make of the Nike Hospitality Suite, a counterpoint to the NFL combine taking place a few frozen blocks away, at Lucas Oil Stadium. He's told that this is where prospects who spend all day being prodded come to get pampered. That, and to score a kale-spinach-banana-blueberry shake.

Grayson, 23, is projected as the third- to fifth-best quarterback in the draft, but he's still adjusting to the life of an NFL hopeful. Five years ago he had just three college scholarship offers; three years ago he suffered a depression so dark that he spent weeks in bed. Back then the Nike suite would have seemed like a football Mars.

Thus, once inside, he poses an innocent question. "The shoes?" Grayson sheepishly asks his agents. "They're, um, *free*?"

Indeed. The free kicks are but one perk of what will be a glamorous new job, NFL quarterback. And Grayson is perhaps the most intriguing one in the draft. At the combine he had formal interviews with the Rams, Eagles and Raiders, and he had informal discussions with most other teams. (He didn't participate in drills until last week, at his pro day, due to a hamstring injury in Indy.) He's intriguing to teams for what he is: athletic, strong-armed, accurate, tough. He's also intriguing for what he's *not*.

Grayson is not a spread guy. At Colorado State he played in a pro-style system. In a position group defined by a pair of potential No. 1 selections (Jameis Winston and Marcus Mariota) but not much depth, that's a major distinction.

Grayson is not Bryce Petty, the Baylor star who at the Senior Bowl called a play for the first time in his life. "That's unbelievable," says Grayson, echoing NFL executives and coaches. Quarterbacks like Petty—guys who never call plays, use snap counts or change protections—arrive in the NFL "light-years behind," says Cardinals coach Bruce Arians. Grayson did all that and passed for more than 4,000 yards last season, earning the Mountain West's offensive player of the year award.

Grayson is not Mariota, the Heisman winner from spread-savvy Oregon, whose combine news conference was broadcast live on *SportsCenter* while a selfie stick bobbed over his head. Nor is he Winston, the Florida State QB whose off-field indiscretions cloud his prodigious skills

Grayson is unlike any quarterback in this class.

IN RECENT MONTHS Grayson hired agents, played in the Senior Bowl, trained for the combine and asked his mother, Jody, a medical practice manager, to describe her favorite car. (Response: "Don't buy me one.") But as everything else changed, his childhood bedroom in Vancouver, Wash., did not. It's still crowded with pictures of Peyton Manning and posters of Michael Jordan; bags of footballs; helmets, trophies and certificates.

In the living room, Jody and his father, Brad, once high school sweethearts but now divorced, spread dozens of pictures across the carpet. There's Garrett—known as Bubba or G-man to family members—in a full Dallas Cowboys uniform at age four, the helmet twice the size of his head. There's Bubba on his grandfather's farm, riding a tractor and feeding the 200 or so cows. There's G in high school, an avid fisherman (mostly salmon) and hunter (elk, deer, pheasant) with surprisingly poor aim for a quarterback. "G was always off," says Brad. "He would wound them, and they would run. Or he would just plain miss."

"His accuracy developed," Jody deadpans.

So did his profile. The NFL Network plays on the flat screen that dominates the living room. Network analysts debate Mariota and Winston nonstop, but they often mention Grayson, too. Brad yawns and stretches his coconut-sized biceps. He's a longshoreman who looks like an NFL linebacker—all veins and thick muscles, no neck. "He's pretty jacked," Garrett says of his dad. "I'll be scared of him until he's in a wheelchair."

Brad nudged his children toward specific sports and positions. His daughter, Ashley, wanted to be a dancer but instead played volleyball at the University of Portland. Garrett hoped to be a running back but moved to quarterback. "Gotta consider the ladies," Brad says with a smile.

Under Brad's guidance Garrett was always moving, throwing, training. He tossed one football against the fireplace so many times that he wore the leather off. He did wall-sits until he cried. He ran hills and rode bikes. He tattooed one of his father's favorite sayings over his heart: DON'T EVER LEAVE SOMEWHERE SAYING YOU COULD HAVE DONE MORE.

At Heritage High he started as a sophomore after the No. 1 QB broke his leg in the opener. In his debut as a starter he led the Timberwolves to 61 points, with 376 passing yards and three TDs. Over the next three seasons he accumulated more than 10,000 total yards of offense. In his final year, playing against rival Kelso in thick mud, he engineered a mesmerizing 15-point second-half comeback. His TD, with 34 seconds left, and tying two-point conversion set up overtime—where he did the same thing again for the win. "I was like, 'Garrett, figure it out,' " says his high school coach, Nate Becksted. "And he did. Every game we won was like that."

Still, Washington State wanted Grayson to play safety. Washington wanted him to walk on. Louisville liked him but had offered too many quarterbacks, so Cardinals coach Steve Kragthorpe recommended Grayson to a friend, Colorado State coach Steve Fairchild—which is how Grayson ended up playing QB at a school he'd never heard of.

Though not immediately. Grayson arrived in Fort Collins the summer of 2010 to find his position overcrowded. The Rams asked him to grayshirt and report back the next January, so he relocated and moved in with his sister, who was teaching high school English in Austin. He volunteered at St. Andrew's Episcopal, a tiny private school whose football coach happened to be Ty Detmer, a Heisman winner with eight NFL seasons under his belt. Grayson ran the scout team and worked with the quarterbacks; in return Detmer tutored him in footwork drills and film study. "I was a little shocked [CSU] hadn't played him right away," Detmer says. "It made me wonder who they had."

When Grayson returned, in 2011, he jumped atop Colorado State's depth chart due to a teammate's knee injury late in the season and started the last three games. Then he fell off it early the next year because of an injury of his own: He broke his collarbone in late September 2012 against Air Force and broke it again in his first game back, in early November against Wyoming. Grayson had never been injured like that. "I went into a funk and just disappeared, basically," he says. "I was sleeping all day, every day. Dark rooms. Ramen noodles.

"You could say I was depressed."

RAM TOUGH

One could get a big head from the stats racked up by Grayson, who overcame injury and depression to lead the Mountain West in nearly every QB category in 2014.





FROM TOP: RON CHENOY/USA TODAY SPORTS; DOUG PENSINGER/GETTY IMAGES

WHEN THE FOG finally lifted, in the spring of 2013, Grayson sought out teammates and apologized for his absence. He met with his coach, Jim McElwain (who'd replaced Fairchild in '12), and offensive coordinator, Dave Baldwin, for extra film study. "He was a highly competitive guy who tried to hit a home run on every play," says McElwain, now at Florida. "He had to learn to take what was there."

That season started with two defeats. After the second, Grayson texted his father, *I don't know what I'm doing wrong.* Brad told him to enjoy the game. Jody urged him to continue meeting with the coaches.

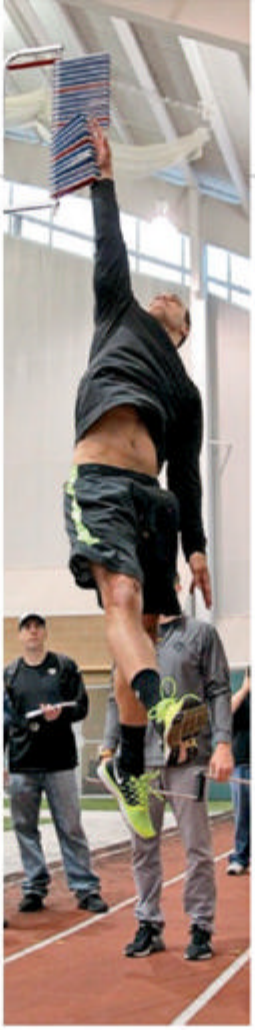
The odds were stacked against any progress in Week 4—at No. 1 Alabama—but that's where Grayson turned a corner. Although the Rams lost 31–6, he completed 24 of 38 passes for 228 yards and no interceptions against a defense stacked with future pros. Afterward, McElwain, a former Alabama offensive coordinator, passed Grayson's phone number to former Crimson Tide QB Greg McElroy, who texted him, *If you had Alabama's team, imagine what you could do.*

From there, growth: six wins in the final eight games, completing the Rams' first winning season since 2008; a school-record 3,696 passing yards; and, in the New Mexico Bowl, an improbable comeback against Washington State in which Grayson helped turn a 45–30 deficit into a 48–45 triumph over the final three minutes.

In both high school and college Grayson made average teams better. At Heritage he was athletic enough to win district titles in both high and low hurdles, and run a 4.63-second 40. But because of his importance, and because of the issues with his collarbone, his CSU coaches often kept him in the pocket. That should make him a better pro. Before his senior season in Fort Collins he nabbed a coveted counselor invitation to the Manning Passing Academy from Archie Manning. Grayson reported back to Baldwin, "Coach, I'm as good as anybody here."

In that final college campaign (after yet another collarbone break, during the spring, while he was moving furniture) Grayson led Colorado State to a 10–1 start and a No. 21 national ranking. Baldwin says his QB "probably shouldn't" have stayed in a game against Boston College after he separated his throwing shoulder, but his 12-yard TD in the final minute gave the Rams their first lead in a 24–21 victory. Five weeks later Grayson injured his groin against San Jose State, but again he played through pain, limping to a 38–31 win. "One of the toughest guys I've been around," says Baldwin, now at Oregon State.

DAN BYERS/CSU ATHLETICS



LATE RISER
Scouts from 12 NFL teams last week watched Grayson complete 70 of 74 passes and show off his 34-inch vertical.

GRAYSON MAY BE THE **ANTISPREAD PROSPECT:** HE SHIFTED PROTECTIONS AND READ DEFENSES; HIS NUMBERS AREN'T INFLATED.

The way Grayson developed—in a pro-style offense, with his athletic ability protected—made him both a better college quarterback and a better pro prospect. "He has one of those bodies that's going to grow and get stronger," says Brett Fischer of the Fischer Institute, where Grayson trained before the combine. "I had Jake Plummer for 10 years; he reminds me of Jake in a lot of ways. He's very athletic. Big wrists, big hands."

Grayson is also, in some ways, the antispread prospect. At CSU he shifted protections and read defenses. His numbers aren't inflated; if anything, elite talent at receiver will only help him grow. The NFL's scrutiny season is about producing, sure. But it's about projecting, too—projecting something unlike RG3, Colin Kaepernick, Geno Smith, Johnny Manziel or any of the other spread guys who have struggled with aspects of the pro game.

"He came along at the right time," says Detmer.

AT HOME in Vancouver, Jody dials up an NFL Network segment. *Path to the Draft*, it's called, and halfway through the analysts debate the third-best available QB, behind Winston and Mariota. "Somebody's gotta go three," says one talking head.

"Here's another name: Garrett Grayson."

"It's so weird to hear that," Jody says.

"He's coming, guys," the analyst continues.

"*Weird*," she says again.

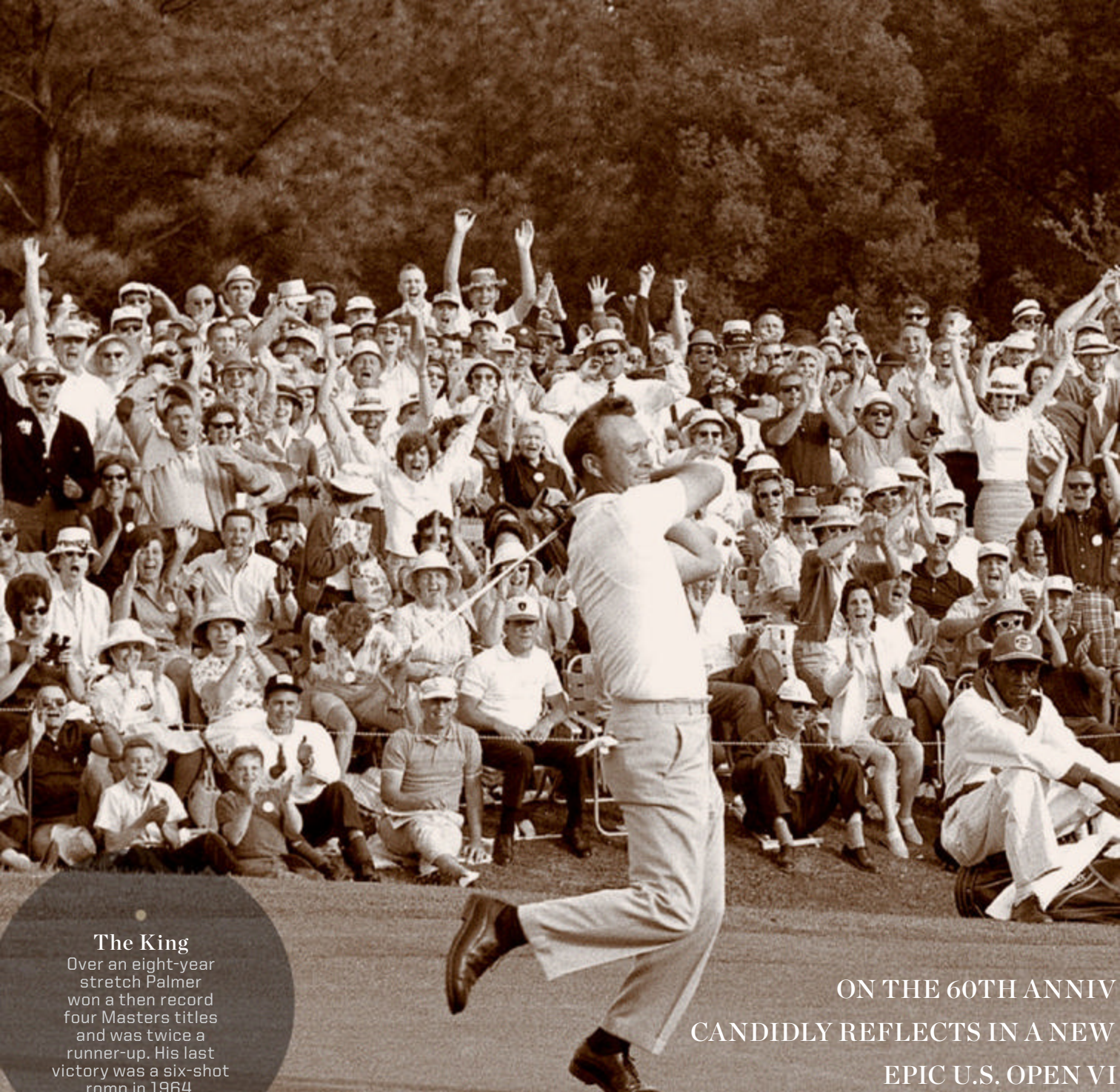
Jody flashes back to her son's childhood, to when his friends stayed over and sat around the fire pit and she cooked massive piles of pancakes and bacon the next morning; back further, to when she wore out her arm throwing footballs to Garrett in the backyard; even further, to the first time he told her he wanted to play professional football. He was five, maybe six.

"Don't you want to be a fireman or something?" she asked him.

No. "NFL," he said.

Overlooked out of high school, underappreciated early on at Colorado State, tutored in Austin by Detmer, injured and afflicted by depression, developed and protected in the Rams' system—everything that happened to Grayson led to this point. "Everyone who could doubt this kid has doubted him," says Becksted, his high school coach. "Now he might be the third quarterback picked in the NFL draft. He worked for it. He learned that nothing is free."

Except the shoes. □



The King
Over an eight-year stretch Palmer won a then record four Masters titles and was twice a runner-up. His last victory was a six-shot romp in 1964.

ON THE 60TH ANNIV
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Arnie U



ERSARY OF HIS FIRST APPEARANCE AT THE MASTERS, ARNOLD PALMER
BOOK ON HIS EARLY CAREER, REVEALS HOW HIS
CTORY HURT HIM AND OFFERS SOME SAGE ADVICE TO TIGER WOODS

BY MICHAEL BAMBERGER

nfiltered

Photograph by
James Drake
For Sports Illustrated



Book Excerpt
From *Men in Green* by Michael Bamberger.

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I fell for golf in its 1970s Sansabelt prime, as a teenager drawn to Ben Crenshaw and his blond mane, his long swing, his wife, who looked better than Farrah Fawcett. What a time: Big Jack was at his brainy peak, Tom Watson putted with a magic wand and Arnold Palmer was trotting the globe in his own plane. Golf was never better. That's my view, anyway, but first love can trick you.

Years later—in the throes of middle age—I traveled around the country, catching up with some of my heroes from yesteryear. I had an ideal traveling partner, my friend Mike Donald, a former touring pro who lost the 1990 U.S. Open in a playoff. I documented our adventure in a book called *Men in Green*. Arnold was our first stop, Jack our last, and the cover is a 1965 SI photo, Arnold and Jack, smiling at some secret joke and wearing sport coats given to them by the Augusta National Golf Club.

This year Arnold Palmer and Augusta National celebrate their 60th anniversary. Arnold played his first Masters in 1955 and his last in 2004, and he has been back every year since to play in the par-3 tournament and to see and be seen. He's 85 now, and in recent years he has hit a ceremonial Thursday-morning tee shot off the 1st at the National. He won the Masters four times, and he's an iconic symbol of the tournament.

Actually, when you get right down to it, Arnold Palmer is an icon, period, in the penthouse of the American Pantheon Building, along with Warren Buffett and Magic Johnson and not many others. What a trip he took to get there. For a working-class kid from a small town in western Pennsylvania, playing a niche sport for next to no money? It's astounding, really. And it makes you wonder: How did he do it? What were the qualities of the man that allowed him to make that journey? In the course of my *MIG* travels, over nearly two years, I saw the man a half-dozen times or more and, with his generous help, tried to find the man behind the icon.

One day Arnold told me about his dreams. A quarter of them are about golf, he said. Another quarter are about business interests. A third quarter are about flying. I asked about the remaining fourth. "Other," Arnold said. *The secret dreams of Arnold Palmer.* Your best guess is good enough.

On our tour Mike and I saw an impressive collection of golfing greats, some famous, some I called "secret legends." Ken Venturi and Sandy Tatum, a former USGA president. Curtis Strange and Dolphus (Golf Ball) Hull, a veteran caddie in Jackson, Miss. Golf Ball's name for Arnold was Bull, for the steam that came out his nose in the early-morning cool. Golf Ball dreamed of caddying for the Bull, but he never did.

Shortly after the 2012 Ryder Cup at Medinah, Mike and I drove across the Keystone State from my home in Philadelphia, bound for Latrobe. You've got to start somewhere, right?

ARNOLD CAN be a challenge to interview. He's been around forever, and he's been asked everything, and I knew we needed some luck. We needed Arnold on a day when he was in the mood.

We arrived early, and Doc Giffin, Arnold's longtime aide-de-camp, ushered us into Arnold's office, in a one-story, white-brick building that looks like the wings attached to the Augusta National clubhouse. He was wearing a brown plaid shirt and had a green sweater draped over his shoulders. He looked great, tanned and strong. He was sitting in a big brown-leather desk chair that did not dwarf him. He stood to shake our hands.

Mike and I sat in chairs in front of Arnold's desk, and Doc sat against a wall, under a portrait of Arnold's first wife, the late Winnie Palmer, her hair swooped like a 1960s Breck Girl. With an assist from Doc, we opened a door for Arnold marked 1954, and Arnold walked through it. His speech, right from the beginning, was slow and measured and precise.



ERICK W. RASCO/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



He began with his win at the U.S. Amateur at the Country Club of Detroit in late August 1954. He was almost 25, a bachelor, an ex–Coast Guardsman, a Wake Forest dropout. He was living in Cleveland and selling paint. He came from a workingman's club nobody knew, and in the final he defeated a tall, slim member of the Long Island golf establishment. If you ever read Herbert Warren Wind's SI account of the event, you might detect a hint of class warfare.

From Detroit, Arnold took us to early September '54, a few days after his win in the Amateur, when he and three buddies made the 400-mile drive from Cleveland to the Shawnee Resort, on the Delaware River in eastern Pennsylvania. They went there to play in an amateur tournament over Labor Day weekend. Fred Waring, a celebrity bandleader and the inventor of the Waring blender, was the host. Upon arrival, Arnold met a 19-year-old Pembroke College student named Winnie Walzer of Coopersburg, Pa., daughter of Martin Walzer, an owner of a canned-foods business, and Mary Walzer, a schoolteacher.

"I met her on Tuesday morning, she and Dixie Waring, Fred's daughter, at the hotel at Shawnee," Arnold said. "They were coming down the stairs, and I was there registering. Somebody said, 'You want to meet a couple of good-looking girls?' And I said, 'Hell yes.' I was single. And they introduced me to Dixie and Winnie. It was my shot. I could take either one. They were both available."

Some of this story was vaguely familiar to me from Arnold's autobiography, *A Golfer's Life*. But this version was already a different version. It was unvarnished.

"So I said to Winnie, 'Why don't you come follow me?'

"She says, 'I can't follow you. We just met. I have to follow Uncle Fred.' That was the first day.

"The second day I told her again that she should follow me. So she did.

"My partner was Tommy—what was his name, guy from Detroit?—Tommy Sheehan. He was a good player. And we romped the field. We won going away. And Saturday night I said to Winnie at the banquet, 'Will you marry me?'

"She said, 'Well, can I have a few days?'

"I said, 'Not really. You better decide pretty quick.'

"And she said, 'Well, give me a day or two and let me talk to my parents.' "

Let's pause for a moment to let this sink in: He met the girl, all of 19, on a Tuesday. He proposed four days later. He was about to turn 25, and suddenly, after some years of not doing very much, he had an epic to-do list. Getting married was on it. Palmer got his *yes* a day after he asked, but it came with an asterisk.

"She said, 'My parents don't like the idea.'

"Her dad hated my ass. He said to her, 'You're going to marry a golf pro?' "

A few days after the Fred Waring tournament, Arnold borrowed money from his Cleveland gang and bought an engagement ring. Two months later he turned pro.

One and Done
Arnie says he lost his edge after his 1960 Open victory (left). He never again won the title he coveted most; he was second in '67 (below) and three other times.



USGA ARCHIVES (ABOVE); WALTER IOOSS JR. FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (RIGHT)

THERE WAS no good reason to think that Arnold could make money at it. He played muscular, slashing golf that was far more suited to match play, the amateur game, than the 72-hole stroke-play events the pros typically played. Still, the Wilson Sporting Goods Co. of Chicago was willing to put Arnold on its staff and give him Wilson Staff irons and a set of woods, a golf bag, boxes of mushy Wilson Staff balls, and to sign him to a modest deal. Arnold drove to Miami with his father to play in his first professional tournament, the Miami Open.

"And at the tournament I ran into a model that I knew from Chicago," Arnold said. "And she was a good-looking broad."

The phrase *good-looking broad*, by the way, does not appear in *A Golfer's Life*.

"I'm engaged now to Winnie. I was out with the model that evening, and I got back to the hotel where my dad was. And it was late.



Child's Play Arnold (at home in Latrobe with Winnie and daughters Peggy and Amy in 1960) has always had a way with kids.

"He said, 'Where in the hell have you been?'

"My father was tough. He was no patsy. And I told him I had run into this lady.

"My father says, 'Arnie, you're engaged. You make up your mind. Are you going to play the Tour? Are you going to quit screwing around? Where's your fiancée?'

"I said, 'She's in Coopersburg.'

"He said, 'Well, you get your ass up there and get her and get going on what you're going to do.'

"I said, 'What do you mean?'

"He says, 'You take the car and go get Winnie and decide what you want to do.'

"So I went to Coopersburg, and four days later I was married. We went to Washington, where my sister was, got a marriage license and got married. We came here for the holidays."

Christmas in Latrobe, 1954. Their honeymoon night was spent at a motel for truckers off the Breezewood exit of the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

I asked Arnold about earlier girlfriends, if he had ever been close to getting married before meeting Winnie.

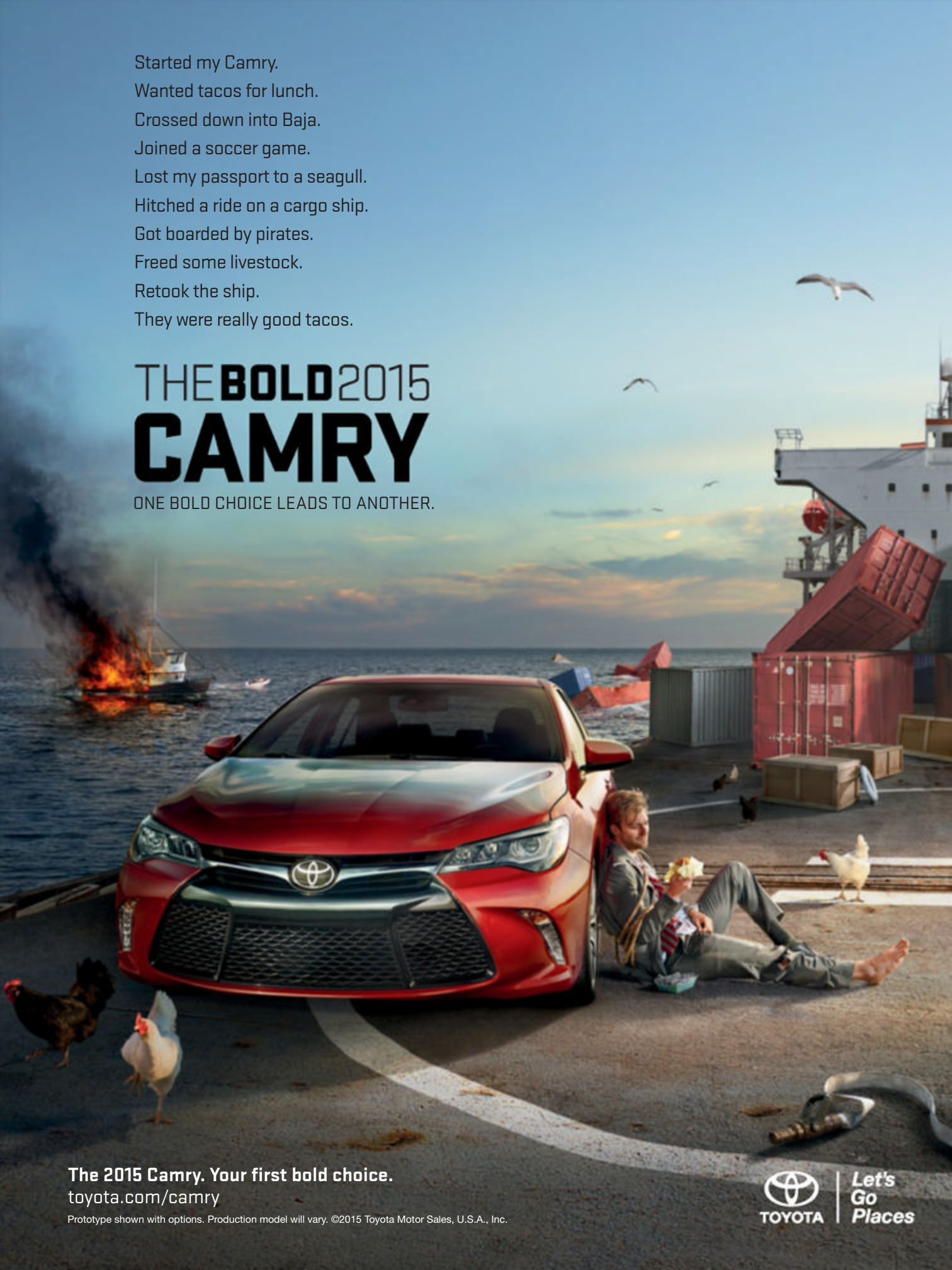
"Well I f----- a few," Arnold said. "But I never wanted to marry them."

Arnold was going off-script. He knew he was not portraying himself as a saint. But he was doing something better and more useful. He was telling a story that was actually believable. I think he wanted us to know, late in his day, the real story of when Arnie met Winnie. For our benefit, for yours, and for his too. You know what they say: The truth will set you free.

I was so struck by how he spoke. The words he used and the stories he told had not been pulverized by some corporate grinder. They were real. His golf ball was "that son of a bitch." The old pro Dutch Harrison, a gambler, got Arnold into a big-bucks pro-am and wanted a "kickback." The Hall of Famer Tommy Bolt "was so bad." A double-date fishing trip with Bolt and his wife, Shirley, ended with the two of them "throwing knives at each other" and Arnold saying to Winnie, "Babe, we gotta split." On the road out, they saw Bolt's own son "thumbing." Regarding the successful Latrobe lumberman for whom Palmer caddied as a kid: "I hung close." He called himself "dumber than a rock." (Fat chance.) When he made money in a Calcutta gambling game, he was "as happy as a dog going to a farting contest with six a-------." His great college friend Bud Worsham was a "bad drinker," and Arnold had to "pull him out of ditches." Arnold got his "ass kicked" on the course by so-and-so. He remembered Bobby Jones once telling him, "If I ever need an eight-foot putt for my life, you're going to putt it." For *my life*. They played for high stakes.

Mike and I were in a trance, listening to Arnold checking off all these old names. I knew most of them, and Mike knew every last one. Dick Mayer, Tommy Bolt, Billy Casper. Ky Laffoon, Porky Oliver. Gene Littler. Hogan and Nelson and Snead. The Worsham brothers and Skip Alexander. Ed Furgol. Harvie Ward. Fred Hawkins. Al Besselink. Mike and I once spent half a day with Besselink,

ROBERT HUNTZINGER FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED


Started my Camry.
Wanted tacos for lunch.
Crossed down into Baja.
Joined a soccer game.
Lost my passport to a seagull.
Hitched a ride on a cargo ship.
Got boarded by pirates.
Freed some livestock.
Retook the ship.
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TOYOTA
Let's Go Places

a Tour star from the 1950s with a loaf of yellow hair. Bessie was a habitué of the South Florida golf scene but also well-known at the betting windows at Gulfstream and Hialeah. Mike had been quoting for years something Bessie told us that day: "Don't date no brokes."

"I'll never forget this," Arnold said. "Winnie and I are driving from Baton Rouge to Pensacola [Fla.]. We're watching the car in front of us. All of a sudden sparks are coming out of the back of that car. I'm watching. And I thought, I'm seeing something that I don't understand.

"I pulled up closer to them, and there's Besselink hanging out of the back door of the car, grinding a wedge on the highway. That's what the sparks were."

You could see it like it was in a movie.

"It really happened," Arnold said.

"Al Besselink's a crazy man," Mike said.

"Oh, s---," Arnold said in casual agreement.

Bosses of Bay Hill

Woods has won the King's tournament a record eight times, but Palmer says Tiger lost his way after his father died in 2006.



ARNOLD AND MIKE were talking golf pro to golf pro, even though Mike won only one Tour event and Arnold won 62. But in the most essential way, I think, Arnold viewed Mike as an equal. Also, they both knew what it meant to lose a U.S. Open in a playoff, a small but meaningful connection. After our morning session in his office, Arnold gave us a tour of his house that wrapped up when he showed us his very nice but really quite modest master bathroom. I detected a certain pride: *This is the house I built with my golf skill.* We then made a 500-yard drive to the Latrobe Country Club for lunch. Arnold introduced Mike to the dining-room manager as "the guy Hale Irwin beat in the U.S. Open. They had a playoff."

We ate at a round table. It was Arnold, his wife, Kit, Doc, Mike, me, and Pete Luster, Arnold's pilot. I ordered an Arnold Palmer. I've seen Arnold have a martini at lunch or a beer or a glass or two of wine, but on this day he ordered a Coke Zero.

We talked about the Congressional Gold Medal that Arnold had just received, and we made a list of the five other athletes who had received it. Jesse Owens, Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson and Byron Nelson came readily. The fifth name was elusive for a minute until Doc remembered it: Roberto Clemente, the Hall of Fame outfielder for the Pittsburgh Pirates who died while doing relief work for earthquake victims.

We talked about the results of the World Golf Hall of Fame voting and whether Fred Couples deserved his spot. Arnold said he had voted for him. That led me to ask Arnold how he would compare Tiger and Fred, just for pure golf talent. Many knowledgeable golf people, Mike among them, will argue that nobody has ever hit a higher percentage of flush shots than Fred.

"That's very difficult for me to tell you about," Arnold said. "Let me think about it some."

I figured it was a topic that, for whatever reason, Arnold didn't want to get into. We moved on to other things. The Ryder Cup. Kit and Arnold's annual trip to watch the Pirates and the Cubs play. The Wake Forest–Duke football game. What happens to players when they go to the broadcast booth.

A full 15 minutes had passed when Arnold said, "I've been thinking about your question."

The table went quiet, and I realized almost immediately that Arnold was answering a question that was far different and more interesting than the one I had asked him.

"Tiger was somewhat of a robot golfer," Arnold said. "He was so endeared to his father and what his father had him doing that it is almost difficult to explain. I watched him practice at Isleworth when he was in the midst of it. As long as he stuck to the routine that his father had laid out for him, he was going to succeed. Had he continued to do that, he probably could have established a record that would never have been broken."

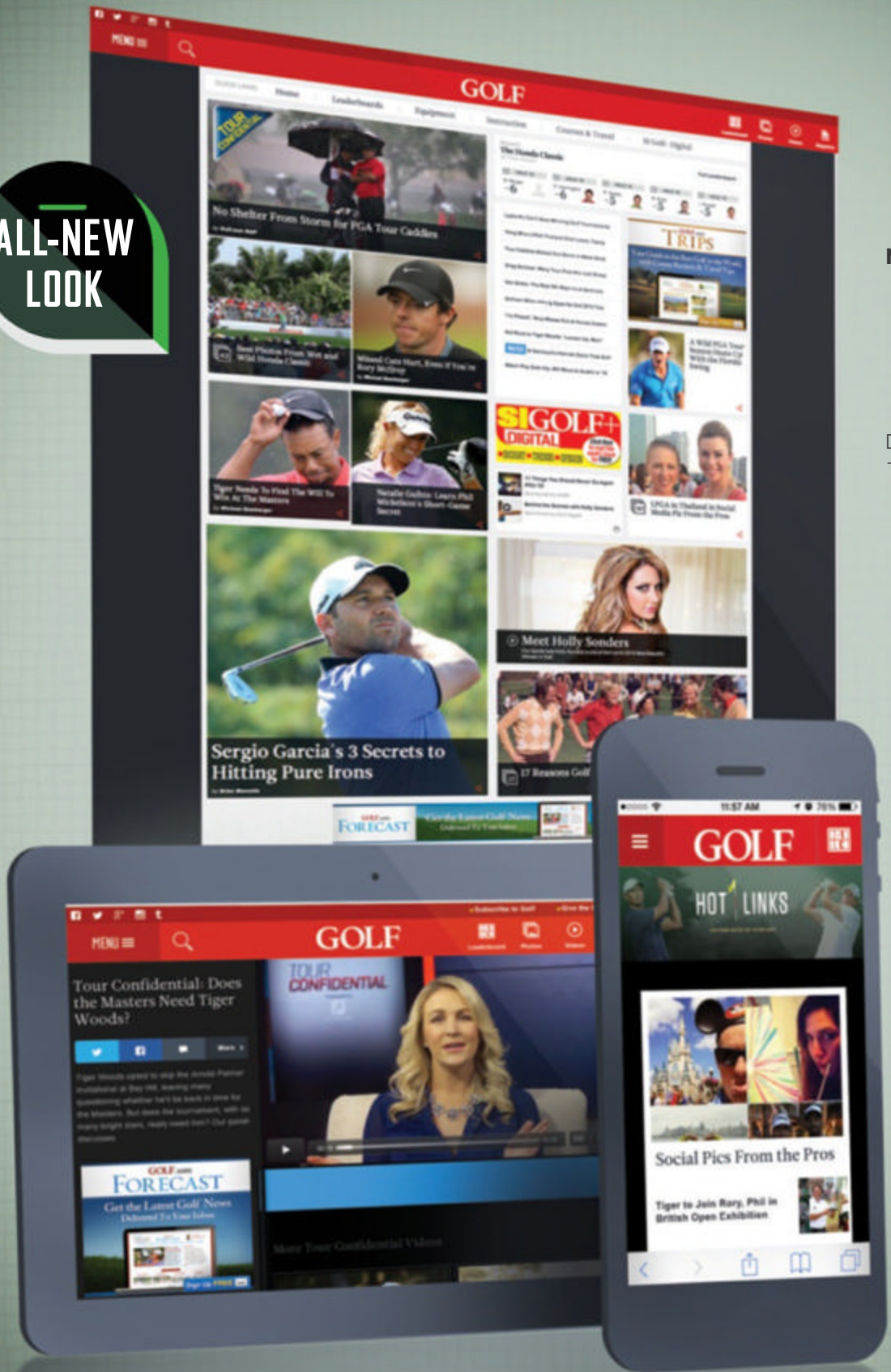
Earl Woods died in May 2006. Since then Tiger has won four major titles: the 2006 British Open and PGA Championship, the 2007 PGA Championship and the 2008 U.S. Open, in the playoff over Rocco Mediate.

"After his father died, and without getting into what happened and why it happened, Tiger got into other things," Arnold said. "He went away from the routine and the work ethic that was so natural for him. It's happened before. It has something to

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do with the psychological effect of the game. If he doesn't try to go back to where he was five or six years ago, he will get worse instead of better. Could he go back to where he was? He could. Do I think he will? No."

JUST SO you know, those were Arnold's own questions. It was like he was interviewing himself. It was like Arnold had thought so much about the subject of Tiger Woods and his struggle to win more majors and was just waiting for the opportunity to talk about it. His sentences were so full and precise.

"I'll switch the tables," Arnold said. "If I hadn't won that U.S. Open at Cherry Hills, I could have won at least four other U.S. Opens. I really believe that."

He won at Cherry Hills, in Denver, in 1960. From there, you could almost see him making the list in his head.

"I could have won in '62."

The year he lost to Jack Nicklaus in the playoff at Oakmont, in Arnold's backyard.



Home Run
Palmer (outside his modest house in Latrobe in 2011) exuded a certain pride in what he built with his golf skills.

"Sixty-three."

Lost in a playoff at the Country Club in Brookline, Mass.

"Sixty-six."

Lost in a playoff at Olympic in San Francisco.

"Sixty-seven."

Tied with Nicklaus through three rounds at Baltusrol. Nicklaus won.

"Seventy-two."

Arnold shot a Sunday 76 and finished four behind Nicklaus at Pebble.

"Seventy-three."

Tied for the lead through three rounds at Oakmont. Johnny Miller shot 63 on Sunday and won.

"If I had had the same psychological approach I did at Cherry Hills, I could have won all those years," Arnold said. "I lost my edge."

That is some admission and some phrase, those last two words, and I didn't even know what they meant. What I knew was that Arnold was being raw and honest and saying things I had never heard him say.

"Winning that first U.S. Open was an obsession," Arnold said. "The first thing you want to do is win an Open. Then, after you win it, you have to stay aggressive, stay the way you were when you won it. And it's difficult to do."

You might be scratching your head here. After all, Arnold won dozens of tournaments after that 1960 U.S. Open, including two more victories at Augusta and his two British Opens. But that was a different era in American golf. That was a time when the U.S. Open was the absolute pinnacle and everything else, even the Masters, was far below it. For Arnold, as the son of a course superintendent from Latrobe, Pa., what could be more important than winning his own national championship? Nothing was even close. He got the one at Cherry Hills and, in some manner of speaking, was done.

Arnold stopped talking, and the table was silent for a long moment until Mike said, "It's such a fine edge."

"It is," Arnold said. "It's *so* fine. You have to get in there, and you have to stay in there, and once you get out, it's very hard to get back in. It's happened to every golfer. Hogan. Nicklaus. Every golfer. It's just a question of when."

Did Arnold have that same obsessive need to practice and improve and win in '65 and '75 that he did in '55, when he won his first Tour event in his rookie year? With all that endorsement money rolling in and his plane idling on the tarmac and the whole world beckoning for him? Not very likely.

Every golfer. Every golfer will someday lose the edge. Tom Watson. Jack Nicklaus. Mike Donald. Tiger Woods. Arnold Palmer. *It's just a question of when.*

Before that day I had always admired Arnold. But I knew nothing about the core of the man, how deeply he felt and understood himself, the game he played, the people he knew, the situations he was in. As it turned out, that day with Arnold, I was only scratching the surface. I kept returning for more, every chance I could. □

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The NCAA's Golden Rule

→ BY LEE JENKINS

THE PRIDE OF UCLA's vaunted gymnastics team is an Olympic gold medalist and a world champion who has won six major all-around titles and captured three American Cups. Only 19, she is healthy and strong enough to do push-ups on parallel bars.

During meets at Pauley Pavilion she displays her talents in all the ways she can: She moves mats. She fills water bottles. She fires T-shirt guns. She selects matching leotards for the Bruins, but she doesn't get to wear one. She never changes out of her sweat suit.

Meet Jordyn Wieber, the most overqualified student manager in college sports. Normally the manager is an earnest undergrad who yearns to be around the program but could never make the cut. Wieber was a key member of America's Fierce Five, helping Team USA claim gold at the 2012 Olympics in London, despite suffering from a stress fracture in her right shin. Her presence on the floor at Pauley prompts many confused whispers. *Is that really Jordyn Wieber, and if so, why is she laying down tape?*

When Wieber was 17, just before the London Games, she signed with Wasserman Media Group and turned professional. "So many amazing opportunities came my way because of that decision," Wieber says. She appeared in commercials, delivered speeches, grew famous and financially secure. The only drawback would come a year later. NCAA rules on amateurism prohibit her from participating in college gymnastics.

Wieber enrolled at UCLA in the fall of 2013, and even though she couldn't join the squad, she couldn't stay out of the gym. She found managing the next best thing to competing. Every day at 6 a.m. she trained alone in the Wooden Center, then morphed from golden girl to gofer when the Bruins entered at 8. She savored her dual identity, but to prepare for the '16 Olympics, she couldn't interrupt her schedule and take long road trips to Arkansas. "She came to me one day with tears in her eyes," recalls UCLA coach Valorie Kondos Field. "I figured, She's done, she's out of here, she's going to get ready for Rio." Instead, Wieber told Kondos Field the opposite: "I've decided I'm not going to Rio. There's no way I'm leaving my team."

An Olympic gold medal, a world gymnastics title, three American Cups: Jordyn Wieber is the most **overqualified student manager** in college sports.

Should the NCAA change its amateurism rules?
Join the discussion on Twitter by using **#SIPointAfter** and following **@SI_LeeJenkins**

Wieber retired from competition last month yet continues positioning springboards, sending email blasts and giving pep talks. The NCAA tournament begins this Saturday, and her seventh-ranked Bruins will be chasing their seventh national title. Her campus job is a source of gratification and pain. "It kills her when we struggle," says senior Samantha Peszek, one of Wieber's roommates. "She wants so badly to jump in and help us."

"It's a crime," Kondos Field says, "because she is not ready to be done." Kondos Field is speaking for all Olympic gymnasts facing the same dilemma: Capitalize on their moments atop the medal stand or preserve their amateur eligibility. You can tell them to forgo the six-figure endorsement deals, enjoy college sports and cash out later. But by then, their moment has typically passed. "There's no such thing as professional gymnastics," Kondos Field says. "They can go to Cirque du Soleil, I guess."

Kondos Field believes the rule book will eventually be amended. Maybe money earned by young Olympians can be put into NCAA-sanctioned trusts and withdrawn after graduation. But that won't help Wieber. She'll be in the working world by then with a degree in psychology. Wieber insists she has no regrets about her choice. What's maddening is simply that she had to make the choice at all.

Then again, Wieber is familiar with bureaucratic heartbreak. Three summers ago her qualifying score was high enough to reach the all-around final in London, but she was excluded because of a Byzantine rule that limits participating countries to two competitors. She quickly gathered herself and shone in the team final. "Sometimes," Wieber says, "you just have to put your own disappointment aside and focus on how you can help the group." That's one element of her routine she is still allowed to perform. □

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